FIELD

FIELD

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This issue of *Field*

is dedicated to

Stuart Friebert

who served the magazine

richly and faithfully

in many capacities

from its founding in 1969

until his retirement in 1997.

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Poetry 1997: Four Review-Essays

THE MICHAEL JACKSON INTERVIEW

"Nature takes its course."
— Michael Jackson, to Oprah Winfrey

Michael Jackson is walking across the lawn,
Is walking across the universe.
That constellation is The Ferris Wheel
And all those bald-headed children
Have cancer. They are going to fly
Among the stars for a few minutes.
They are going to take his prayers to heaven.

Michael Jackson has a skin disease.
He is turning into a white
Woman who looks a lot
Like his best friend Brooke Shields.
When they kiss they cannot
Tell each other apart.

Michael Jackson might live forever.
He has the background for it
And the personality.
Standing behind Elizabeth Taylor
He showed a King Tut profile.
When the smoke alarm went off
He didn't blink.

Age cannot wither him, nor custom stale
His infinite variety. A ghost, a clown,
A china doll, a girl, stormtrooper, Jesus,
Werewolf, Diana Ross, the World,
Mother Theresa, Pharoah, motherless child,
Michael Valentine Smith
Or Michelangelo, a child
Whose father beat him, who died to sin,

Whose father beat him again
And again. Beat him again
And again and again. Beat him again.
Beat him again. Beat him.

BLACK PEARLS

On Lutheran Day in Arlington, Texas, born-again
baseball players speak in tongues & hand out religious tracts
instead of autographed photos. I feel so distant from them
that if I felt a bit closer, George Clooney, who in 1982
drove from Augusta, KY to L.A. in a beat-up Monte Carlo
in pursuit of an acting career, would be my best friend.
And Roy Sawyer, curator of Charleston, South Carolina's
Medical Leech Museum, with its ornate bleeding bowls,
and 18-inch Amazon leeches fed on sausage casings filled
with stillborn pigs' blood, would be my second best friend.
My sisters & brothers would be Mexican zoologists crawling
the beaches looking for Kemps Ridley Sea Turtles, 120 years old.
And I'd be making a million dollars inventing liquid leather
insta-fabric while feeling desperate & homely,
like those Elizabethan women who plucked their hairlines
for higher foreheads, & drank dog urine for softer skin.
I'm a foreigner here. I'd like to teach the locals how to mix
martinis and lead nature tours, but I'm a tourist myself,
wanting to see everything — from a five-foot, pink Mississippi
phlox,
to a six-foot striped canna from South Africa (which of course
makes one only more desperate than ever to own a variegated
radish
with three-foot crinkly green leaves & white blotches).
Before I die, I'd like to see Polynesia's 500 pearl farms.
Beneath the placid blue waters of the lagoons, millions of black-
lipped oysters hang in mesh panels, nourished by tidal flows,
the pearls inside growing microscopically every day — black
pearls giving off a rainbow lustre. I'm closer to those pearls
than to the Texas Rangers baseball team chatting in the locker
room:
"Noah? No, *Jonah* got barfed up on the beach at Nineveh."

THE TUNNEL OF LOVE

We strolled all day through the Isle of Youth's arboreal
tunnel of love & spent evenings listening to the island's native
music, the *sucu-sucu*, a slow, countrified version of salsa.
We spotted tangerine-colored crabs & tree-scaling crocodiles.
We thought that seeing the walls & ceilings of caves carved
with red & black serpentine lines representing the celestial
calendar of the Ciboney Indians might give us a new perspective
& that goats asleep in the shade beneath the thatch-roofed
houses on stilts might relax us. We still came home to massive
PMS bloats & seas of Fudgesicle wrappers, to shaving cream
& black hairs in the bathroom sink. We argued about the rules
of tennis & about who played Hopalong Cassidy. When
our ferret ran away, we fought about whether or not to hire
Sherlock Bones, a pet detective who puts up mug shots
on telephone poles & has a data base of grooming parlors, vets,
& pet stores. We tried to cheer ourselves up by painting
the kitchen lime green, the cabinets canary yellow, & the closets
in mauve & blue stripes. We bought a chair shaped like a hand
& an Eiffel Tower hat rack. But we still looked at each other
& said, "You left the car windows open before it rained.
You forgot to take out the trash. *You're* the one who said that
Vietnamese Potbellied Pigs are housetrainable & don't grow big.
And now, look at him, snorting & drooling, occupying half
of the sofa." We thought that setting up targets in our backyard
to practice fly-casting might help us. We took up white-water
rafting & kayaking. But we argued about God and sex.
Finally we sold the chair shaped like a hand, & donated the pig
to the petting zoo. You packed your suitcases as I wept
in our green kitchen. Before slamming the front door, you shouted,
"You're so stupid you didn't even know who painted *American
Gothic!*" "Yeah?" I said. "Before you met me, you didn't even know
the 13th president of the United States was Milliard Fillmore!"
But you were already gone, your heels clacking down the walk.

DEFINITION

Bones I can understand, dry
bones that rise up an army
or dance a skeleton dance of one
on my ear drum. Bones
in the hands of a rhythm band
I've heard click-clack into a kind
of scaffold you and I
might climb to clean the face
of a seraphim painted in oils.
But tell me, love, what do you call
this, known as flesh, that comes
and goes under my hand, warm
or cool, ruddy or pale,
not quite pallor but patina
over debris of your thinking day?
Do I name it *you* or a mere
robe of flame or snow you wear
draped on this fine architecture
that outlives wherever my hand
wants to go?

RETIRED

Seven floors up
from con artists
and appetites
she's caretaker now
of city air. Sharp-
winged swallows cut
across boundaries
of light, a lost bee
mourns his buzz-song
on her screen and dies.
Who-dun-its by lamplight
are out: braver stuff
is the mix now. On days
of window-glass melt
when the floor tilts
in the wind she glides
with the birds and woos
the crows to line up
black on her dresser
to teach them all the
consonants and vowels.

FREE SAMPLES

East of Asheville, rush hour, I-40, August
sun a warm feather pillow; deep-squint
as we pass the Biltmore Oil truck

at seventy-five; Blue Ridge
a regular EKG above the highway's
skidmarked corridor,

green as we approach it,
green as we go away.
God bless input:

mullein, joe pye weed, queen anne's lace
as if the guardrail was put there
to keep them lined up

below the sweetgum's limp, lace-cuffed wrists,
the catawba's fat green junkmail. God bless
the empty basketball courts, netless rim

on telephone pole, red clay
cracked and weed-patched. God bless
the runaway truck ramps

as we leave Pisgah National Forest,
and come into furniture country
— life's free samples —

burning brake pads, Sue's fingers,
like smilax, on the van's wheel,
loose, long, and unfailing;

snuffaluphagi of kudzu, shudder of sedge;
silent but deadlies in the back seat,
and alphabet races: B-bridge, C-grace.

LATE MORNING IN THE UNDER-ATMOSPHERE

The treetops are nowhere, as insignificant
as an idea,
and life-affirming. But, to the east, stretched

between the trunks of two persimmon trees —
ragged juveniles —
a spider is spinning another groove

in its 33, clockwise threads
concentric with the web's midpoint,
its bullseye, now you see it,

now you don't. Light's funny — sometimes,
the thin, dartboarded segments
of 12 & 6 o'clock

are a fuzzy gossamer rainbow color;
sometimes there is only the black triangle
of the spider, going around,

before the immense spreadeagle
of green, like a second-hand
with no arm, like a thing

with nothing better to do. Below,
in the morning's groundswells,
in the displacement of the yellowjackets

& bottlefly's fast wings,
in that stepped-on & overlooked atmosphere,
alive with thermals, microbursts,

twelve thousand dramas and
undiscovered genres, a daddy long leg,
its body more acorn fragment

than pentagon reject,
waits its turn
to dismember a katydid, waits

behind a red ant
to tear from the katydid's wings
or abdomen,

a scrap, a nickel-bagged
piece of cargo
too heavy to go far with.

SHAKES

It is already too much,
how you've decided,
your mute bald nod.

The child won't nod back.
You're what she learned
every year, more dread.

The man who warms the bier
makes other arrangements.
Hate is love on a drip.

Embrace, embrace but the squeeze
shuts off the air. Nothing
mechanical boots you free,

you've got to shake all of us
goodbye singly. You can't find
the will to will it otherwise.

THE RULE OF K

Give someone a name beginning with K
if you want a hero.
— Neil Simon

In the dead body:
my brother, doppelganger.
Look over
my shoulder:
he was paranoid.
But what's
natural cause at forty?

At night he'd open
the first volume and read:
Aardvark, earth pig, 3½ feet long,
then read to K,
then sleep.

K's the vitamin
they give you if you bleed.
I had K in Africa,
miscarrying like a pig,
some other lady
dead without it,
the double.

What divides me from him —
eleven months
eighteen days —
will never close.

But who was that fat Karen
after his money and why
did he keep a crippled cat
he couldn't catch?

The sound of K multiplies.
Christ, another paranoid,
with a name you can hear
from every pew, was born again
on the day he died.

I need a hero.
Hear the cat
he couldn't catch,
crying for liverwurst?
What's worse than liverwurst?

My brother ate it
to prove he wasn't me.
Now, surely, he's not.

HOME IS A STONE HOUSE

Is the gate closed at the bottom
sounded like *Stay close to papa.*
We three who drive out here to hear her talk now
sit and watch her.
The lettuce is unwashed.
Gil left her
and she climbed Three Fingered Jack,
anchored her bedroll to the flattest spot
and hung that night. Then Broken Top.

In her loss and loneliness she watched
the birds below her. Raptors. Odd,

that god should be placed
above and not just *elsewhere.*

Successive hills took on a graduation,
not fainter,

quite, but lighter.
The distance calmed her.

Hummock of bivouac contained her body like a sac.
She could lean back into nothing

and still be there.

The rocks are just the way I left them she says
so we look.
Watch her flick the shiny inched-up to a hunch-
back bug out the threshold.
It drop, her pick it up and fling it out into the social
bunchgrass.

OLYMPIC RAIN FOREST

I left the shutter open, the camera
flooded with light, the negatives
were abstract and damp as the undersides of leaves.

So much greenish light, I had never
imagined a transfusion of so much tenderness.

Why can't it all be printed? How can I stand here
holding in one hand a fossil fern, in the other
a colored guide from the Sierra Club?

Travel isn't originality. I
left the shutter open.

What I need is a new medium, one that will register
the weight of air on our shoulders, then
how slowly a few hours passed,

one that will show
the print of your heels that morning on the spongy forest floor,
there, not there.

MOURNING PICTURE

"For John Berryman (1914–1972)" by Shirley Eliason (1929–1988)

A shower of stones. Volcano? *There is no color.*
As if he would never stop falling. Unwritten stones.
The unwritten storm around me. Ashes. Black earth.
Searing, dissolving. . . . When I heard of your death
I thought you could never stop painting, I thought
Even the rocks grow pregnant. Frog spawn. Scum.
The beach is quilted with stones about to hatch.
See, they are crawling inland. *Messengers of chance —*
each stone still glistening from its watery birth. . . .
Your going was private, natural. *Not to be lost:*
two hands fallen open, splayed and very small,
and the abrupt head, indecipherable still.

NOTHING I MEANT TO KEEP

Nick said, radiant, being helped upstairs
by a girl, *What's more*
I could marry you in an hour!
That woke me up! but could I marry him?
No, no, my heart cried, from its demure shell.
The girl I was at twenty-three,
that shackled-with-politeness girl,
shook her head, but look, she has turned gray,
arms still locked across my breast.
Breast: ash and translucence now.
Heart: old spark, nothing I meant to keep —
Conversations, or nothing.

ALBUM

Anything seen through an arch is instantly picturesque. Why keep hoping things will speak for themselves, without your aid? The small wish for a tableau. The sunset might well bear you off on its pulleys of delight, the buildings are still strewn vacantly around the square. But you know what to frame. You know how to count. Arch flowing into arch flowing into arch, and through the last arch, what was dumb will speak. After all, it is the halos that tell us who the saints are. Rows of poplars: somewhere, a river, and workers bathing. Won't it all be laid out for you in sequence in the end, what has truly fallen into your frame? And everything else, the ungroomed land, the dead tea-roses, the body moving out of the shot. Who wouldn't be sentimental, given half the chance.

ALL THAT GLITTERS

A new conception: that you, too, might be the kind of person who does not write back. You always kneeled first because the hard ground seemed to discipline you to it, with its acres of truth. You truly believed we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us. And then the problem worried itself to the bone: what you would have others do unto you is surrender. Suddenly you catch a glimpse of yourself in the crowd: wearing dark glasses. You want to follow yourself. You want to write to yourself and feel the slow mortification of yourself not writing back. The virtue of the skyscraper is that it knows not how towering a flower it is, in the formal garden. No one notices the knickknacks. Martyrdom moves only one heart to tears.

WAR SPOUSES

He had crossed somewhere near here
on a carrier in the war —
and his wife couldn't get over
the vein throbbing in her leg.
She mentioned it three times in the hour.
And sometimes the other spouses —
it was as if they were waiting — for what?
Some liked to make things happen
while their old husbands were going off
about the war,
the wife who dropped a lit match
into another woman's lap at the party,
or the one who insisted on walking
across the street
ahead of us to see
what strangers noticed her alone.
And there was something swivel-headed
about most of them at gatherings —
as if there must always be someone coming for them,
no telling, no one they knew of . . . .
But then someone said something from a bubble of rage,
or because of too much heat in the room,
or because of the strange salty food day after day,
or because of the islands, that they were all flung about,
accessible only by deadly small planes.
Isn't it just like a novel?, the one with
the awful vein said,
meaning that her husband's death was meant to occur
not far from the ocean
in the tensions and discomforts of travel,
and as if the vein, too, must be visible on her leg —
it hurt her, tracing some route
that she had at last become
if only by making
herself a combatant
in the last catastrophe she could.

SOUP AT DAWN

The panel slid open
for the first meal of the day.
The place seemed more like a home than an inn.

Bowls of soup centered on the table.
Soup, not clear, but like
boiled creek water.

Steam filling the room.
How would I live with
my body imagining all by itself

its strange chemicals,
its drying liquors,
its cracked bed.

Whatever illness waited,
that taste in my mouth couldn't be tasted yet.
All these approximations:

one mirror upon another —
to come closer, to change before us.
The panels slid open with each guest.

The bus driver
peeled and floated,
knotted and unknotted in the cold mist.

And now, close, his shirt
the color of a brown paper bag.
How strange when I stood up

and part of me was not walking at all.
Holding back. For the future's sake.
The soup: a soy with floating grasses

like an oval of dark rain water on a path
worn in the woods.
Clouds moving off the sun

and the whole ground changes.

THE RUIN

It's possible to walk to the ruin.
The ruin is alone with ivy
which flushes over its flanks
while the whole of a rumpled vastness
is closed in chutes, in folds, in compresses,
in between musclings of starfish ferns.
An underground roaring
is about to be broken against the ruin
and here — with what ingenuity —
sea tides drive fountains.
The tides rise by ligaments.
It's the sound of water sluiced about in a sink
or a dishcloth slapped onto a counter.
A kind of wish thicket
tinges the leafy morning of a century.
Despite this controlling motion
the tides know themselves
in an airy flotation,
like a tongue that cries liberty.

MOSSED HEADLAND

I've seen a fine patch,
practically a mold,
nearly hallucinogenic.

A scalp, a thaw, I've
bought and tended.
It came as if called

to something like life.
When the ground was bare
the moss appeared.

It made its teaspoon
of a moor as its mouth.
A quiver of flaws.

Things were good enough
to disintegrate for it,
as in the *Turkish Bath*

of Ingres where
women's bodies are coiled
brains, a culture fungal

and languorous,
cochlea and pillions.
Various sleeping poses

of a fairy ring. Puffball
spores. I was between
the moss and the mushrooms,

where what spades easily
prefers shade.
Yet painted into soil

this variety almost seems
like barnacles,
fur, tiny handholds,

ready to visit our minds.
Apt medicinal dye.

WEATHER CHANGES

Ice locks down
on Lac du Flambeau
but there is no snow.

We strap on steel skates
and slide across
the frozen water. Ice dips

then springs back. A muskrat
swims beneath the ice
and breathes the air between

one thing and another.
I bite my lip till it rusts.
We make a fire and oil

our skates. An oily film
sizzles beneath the fire.
Jack has a file and no-

body speaks till the filing
is over. The muskrat's tail
is long and bare. We expect

it to be. The muskrat
rocks from side to side
beneath the ice where

we see his eye
and its little fire.
The ice grows thick

and white to the silt,
and I steal a bite
of your frozen ear.

You spring back, fear
swimming beneath your eye.
Ice cracks and sounds like

thunder, like a gun, when
the weather turns warmer.
There is no snow

but the weather grows colder.
You slide your hand along
the steel blade,

nick a finger. Nobody speaks,
but something breathes deeper
as the rust flakes away.

THE BOARDWALK

Who called for this trail? Not the thrush, who needs none
and whose tongue has no peep or syllable for *drown*.
Not the water striders, who dance on the shroud of the drowned
which is also the sky over the trout's nest.
The boardwalk is planked like a dock, it is what I need
to enter the freshwater marsh on the hem of the bay
and speak with the herons, who think I am one of them,
standing as still as they and fishing for what I love,
the poplar shaking the light off itself like a dog,
the muffled torches of cattails, the smokebush shaky as sand,
and the water lilies in bud unpacking their crowns,
their round leaves slit, like clocks with one hour lost
and water sounds the same as the word for land.

NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER

Just as I tried to breathe the new, light
stuff that burned the wet tissue of throat —
just as I made my way out

from inside her, from the dark
black-reds of inside to the cradle
of her round legs — the god streamed in.

His wet arms reaching across
the wide sky between worlds, he clutched
my flimsy soul and pulled me

into the water. Not blue, but blue, green,
purple, even touches of fuchsia and gold,
swirls and spirals that turned into stars.

I don't know where I was.
Somehow, through the glow, a voice
warned, *Chaos will rule your heart.*

I didn't care what it meant, though the rumbling
shook me — I took the starry water in,
long, delicious liquid breaths:

I didn't have a choice.
And then I saw him, green-blue god,
his tangled beard grown in with sea-lice,

seaweed, tiny crabs, his eyes grey-blue
and filled with waves, like cracks in marble,
that crashed and sprayed when he looked at me.

And there in the water were other gods,
confusion of garments, of hair, and voices
tugging, but Neptune said *she is mine.*

He drew his hand across my forehead, gently —
and pushed me under. The small blank face
of a starfish was the last thing I saw.

Below was black and cold, the water more
hysterical — *is this my heart?* I wondered.
The gods had begun chanting

the song of my new father, tones
that stretched me to the furthest corners
of the constellation.

There wasn't time for answers, though more words came,
a stream of murmuring sounds that grew lighter
and I thought unforgettable,

but I was wrong. Not waves, not Neptune, but the small,
dry, indifferent hands of man began hitting
my back. Shock. Whiteness.

I cried my first salty cry, the way
I was supposed to — spit and tears against
the stinging air, and gone, bright splashing god.

AGAINST HIS QUITTING THE TORN FIELD

Let him put his mouth in the dust — there may yet be hope.
Lamentations

"How, entering,
inside him, it became more
easy to believe I would not
breathe the same, it would not be
my life, breathing/breathed
— out, again, ever."

*

There was a bird, once,
like that. Or —

Or, shorn of bird — call only —
a calling to that seemed
it would never end, be done
raveling.

It starts that way. Likely

*

it goes, somewhere else:

the mouth that says *You can do anything, here;*

the arm tattooed with —
as obviously as if this were
dream — the one word:
Paradise; all in a row, shut

against a frost that, even here, has
place, nine tulips —
seven; oh

and the peonies, or almost, each one
still a fist, which is to say, fat
with chance, or the hard
waking you will have forgotten bone also

*

can be. Somewhere else:

All house lights down.

Rustle of what no longer is required, being shed.

Sounds connoting struggle,
then —

silence? or
— like silence — resolve?

Lights up, on

the male lead, who has just found the body,
the body is someone's
he loved, he can see
it is dead; all the same
does he rock it, and rock it, poor

*

— bird?

There *was* one.
As there will be: yes, another.

Those birds fly well
which have little flesh,
and many feathers.

Though the flesh is
our enemy, we
are commanded to support it.

Of leaves, recall,
were the first garlands woven for
none other than, triumphant, the flesh.

*

Thus, the shield.

She set the clattering bronze down, before him.

UNBEAUTIFUL

Not blond not
well-fashioned not cut
from the enviably

blue silks, imagine, that
medieval fingers stitched into
streamers to be — by hands more fair, at

races — waved, to say *La, let*
this horse win,

let that one,

La,

*

as in Siena, where she
is treacherous — the course — a steep
bowl; the one thing sure: that

some of the horses will die,
or — broken now, and
wingless — be made to,

as the cobbled stones, bucketed,
hosed clean of blood, will
again shine.

Not any of these. More,

*

these flowers — their
stems. How,

by their own
burst crowns (flush-colored, color of

shame) conquered,

they bend just
shy of that angle things

find,

breaking.
— Unbeautiful,

*

and against
all wanting it, I do only what —
to whatever flourishes too well — ugly
has done

always. See here: these invisible

curves on the air, to mark
where a good was let go, a heart
jettisoned — that variously someone,
something else catches, does

not catch hold of: Wind Hands The water

*

Don't cry.

The artist is one who does not
make mistakes.

Don't cry out.

There was a silence, even, to
the angels in their falling.

In trinities,

In troops they fell.

Stars —

Every one.

THE TRUTH

And now,
the horse is entering
the sea, and the sea

holds it.

Where are we?

Behind us,
the beach,
yes, its
scrim,
yes, of
grass, dune, sky — Desire

goes by, and though
it's wind of course making
the grass bend,

unbend, we say
it's desire again, passing
us by, souveniring us with
gospel the grass, turned
choir, leans into,

Coming —
Lord, soon.

Because
it still matters, to say something. Like:
the heart isn't

really breakable,
not in the way you mean, anymore
than a life shatters,

— which is what
dropped shells can do, or a bond sworn to,
remember, once

couldn't, a wooden boat between
unmanageable wave and rock or,
as hard, the shore.

The wooden boat is
not the heart,
the wave the flesh,
the rock the soul —

and if we thought so, we have merely been
that long
mistaken.

Also,
about the shore: it doesn't
mean all trespass
is forgiven, if nightly
the sand is cleared of
any sign
we were here.

It doesn't equal that whether
we were here or not
matters,
doesn't —

Waves, because
so little of the world, even
when we say that it has
shifted, has:

same voices,
ghosts, same
hungers come,
stop coming —

Soon —

How far the land can be found to
be, and
of a sudden,
sometimes. Now —
so far from rest,
should rest be needed —

Will it drown?

The horse, I mean.

And I — who do not ride, and
do not swim

And would that I had never climbed
its back

And love you too

DISSOCIATIVE

Nearer November I forbid
courtesy & the last persistent visitors:
I make myself scarce then.
My front stoop's remaining door
answers evasively, picks at its
modest lock; meanwhile the spotless
kitchen collects its implements & amenities
& adjourns to the pond,
where silver flaps off the clanging
deciduous trees & the tumblers
lift, plates & their cups
clatter to rise
overhead into the long goose lanes.

Ah, but my domestic
featherbed plumped somewhere
upstairs sighs
in satisfaction to stay behind:
swollen with air
it consorts upon a voluminous
hush at last, where the raw moonlight loafs.

Goodbye, goodbye! There goes
the better part of my intermittent
undoing love,
shunting birds like the calculus
an abacus ticks through distance
itemizing the loss
rag by straw.
Some of that tumult carrying-on is the wind
& some is wings, the birds
in a great hurry now,
the wind hurrying after them, its
stings in tow,
scissors and its snips of snow.

WHERE IT HURTS

Won't catch a verse of mine staring out its window,
goofing, & nary a soul's best
interest at heart, or drooping a lengthy
ash off its contemplative slow burn — o only subside,
delirious fever!

Dear passerby, trust me.
Allow me to finger & pepper that one
wound you still cherish of ignominy, your Jesus-stab
at the rib, in the very hinge of love,
in the moment you first fell under hammer-and-tongs,
nitwitted with wonder

over your first poem, say, that you'd perfectly
lettered in blue crayon,
when, just then, came & over & over
again comes the school bus, o golden
coach that all too soon too openly hisses & flaps
to engorge itself with the others,

lummoxes of prestige, derision & mayhem, careening
the rubbery aisle!
As you lurched,

as your peacock-iridescent
stanza flutters & self-destructs
with a vengeance so dinky it cannot but captivate
my regard,

this greeting circulates to croon to you: not
a prayer in the world.

EVERYTHING FALLS AWAY

: the #86 train, its track, and
the track's gully down toward the sea, around
the mountain, and the mountain falling
rock by rock over the track, and across
my ancestors' lifetimes — before the gulls
and the Stark White Sand Ages
which fell away into the Gray Ages,
the Dark Ages. Sea of black
anonymity. Those gulls fall.
The civilized and the unfed: the cry
and the feathers falling. First a tremble,
a wink of light, a blur. The slide
of your palms' warmth across my cool
hipbones. Down. Sea on a Sunday. Coffee
in tiny cups from the subdued life.
Slow gestures of the gulls,
top of the 6th on a radio, and
one man out. Heaps of the new world
around our feet, which we step out of
and fall away from too.

AT THE HIGHER ELEVATIONS

What's a thrill now but the taboo heights.
The snows of the peaks. The breaths
of a blizzard blowing. And greed, Madame,
greed. *God's hand hurts,* say the old women
we pass at the trailhead. We don't
follow this. They hate us. Fugitives
in thermal socks, we've flown in
from the future. They wear
black scarves. Peel potatoes.
Their hands hurt. They wave.

VICTORY

for a trucking daughter,
and after Marianne Moore

The poet said it wouldn't
come to her unless
she went to it. Express

you've gone there, climbed
the little ladder, perched
behind the wheel to launch

all seventy-three feet
of rubber, steel, and spark,
explosive power. The ark

you keep keeps you between
the lines except to pass
inferiors, or cross

to other states. I see you
in my rear-view mirror:
each high-riding driver

of a live-in truck is maybe
you, who once jumped horses,
leaving me to parse

my fatal sentences outside the ring.
You, who overcome
the chemistry of harm,

the choker strung on DNA.
What is there like fortitude!
to clear this Julie's road.

KETTLE

An old woman gets tired of her sad face
so she fills her soup bowl with fresh water
then stares into that small lake until she sees
her reflection floating there but softened.
She smiles and when she does that,
her sadness gets tricked into the bowl,
surprised to be lightened a little at last.
Then she takes that bowl into high grass
and leaves it there for the rough tongues
of homeless cats to scratch across;
for starlight to mend itself in.
Now, who knows whether she is old
or young, this woman who tricks away despair.
She's laughing as she peels the wrinkled skins
from red potatoes, dropping them moon
by moon into evening's kettle: new root soup.

THE MAGENTA GLOVE

She removes her glove that is the same
magenta as a port wine birthmark
or one of those extravagent violet spectrum sunsets
that stain the sky with carnival.
He takes her hand the way you would be gentle
with a child who has invited you
into communion with the invisibles.
In his dusk grey suit, he looks grave and innocent
as a Paris opera tenor, circa 1920.
He bows his head then looks at her palm,
as if considering which, of all the rosy D'Anjou pears
he will choose from the pyramid of fruit
on the sidewalk vendor's stand.
This one! Bows his head even lower, lifts her hand
and kisses it softly, as if in homage to the entire orchard.
How humble he is, too, like a child
with a piece of bread who sees a blue-grey bird
perched on the edge of an ancient fountain
so he inches toward the pigeon and sets down his gift
as close to the bird's strange red feet as he can.
As if the bread were a piece of the sun itself
that he had broken off with his own hand . . .

PHILOSOPHY, THE VANDALS SAY

Is no better than a poem. There they lie,
Those vandals, drinking before noon;

They have come to build the neighbor's
Cedar deck one Saturday, beer after beer,

She loves me, she loves me not.
The vandals glow in safety-orange

Hunters' garb and camouflage, they glow
Like words highlighted on a page.

Near the trees, a deer leaps into
The future, a flash of the letter A:

The vandals stare, betwixt, agog;
The cedar deck remains unbuilt

Within its beams, neither Being nor Becoming.
In our house next door, a picture window

Pictures nothing; we lie untouching,
Spent, neither Being nor Becoming,

Side by side. Philosophy, the vandals say,
And then their words trail off like . . .

The vandals know they're safe,
In the nation of their making;

They slap each other's back, pretend
That comedy is love. And you and I?

We prop ourselves with pillows, watch
The watchful deer nibble on a peony

— Are we kept within her gaze? —
Until she leaps into the greenery:

Gone, inscrutable, that blur beyond
The legible, within the trees' mad alphabet.

CHANSON (OU SONT LES VANDALS?)

Pretty pretty pretty lies the day
In its banality, as *les pensées*

Repeat themselves in a simple vase.
The baby on the dhouri is neither

Sad nor happy, just a baby just like
You are you and I am me. *En le chanson*

So hoity-toity, chi-chi, whoop-de-do,
The whirligig, the roundelay, the jazz of

Sound supplants all meaning.
(But it's French and so it sounds . . .)

Sad sad sad bends the sky
Around the skyline, bruised, bewildered,

All our hopes projected on its scrim.
(The baby wakes. The baby speaks

Her perfect, wordless French.)
Ou sont les vandals, mon chèr,

Mon petit pois? What is
History to myth? For the vandals

Have not come — *mon serviette, mon fou* —
And the poem without them,

Like our lives alone, makes no sense.
The baby cries. The day becomes

Another day. *Ou son les vandals,*
Mon flocon de neige, mon petit mal-de-tête?

Where are those vandals,
My porcupine, my potted fern?

THE DARKNESS

Darkness, the electric eel, darkness, the throat of an alligator. Darkness is transformed into heat, time is expanded forwards and backwards, and in the circular tunnel our thought-protons accelerate. The autopsy is underway, the one conducted by antipodes. They have the faces of apes.

From the darkness comes a voice of unknown origins, foreign or our own, saying — You are getting on my nerves.

In the darkness, in our retinas, a puppet theatre is performing, without a state manager. We have some characters in common. The demons, for instance.

THE SILENCE

A broad smile from the abyss. A volcano that didn't erupt. The cannon ball, stalled above the turquoise landscape. Postponement of the punitive expedition. The Trojan War does not take place. Helen still waits for her orgasm. Laurel rots midway between defeat and victory.

Breathless, we have been wrapped by a boa constrictor, we have been squeezed by a blindworm, we have been fondled by a tapeworm, pinworms have hugged our vessels' endothelium, resulting in elephantiasis of our redundant limbs.

Fumes rise from the entrails of gutted orators. White teeth are strewn around, the result of a panel discussion and as a rudiment of reason. And the dead stroll among us, with life on the tip of their tongues.

translated by Rebekah Bloyd, with the author

MYSTICISM FOR EVERYBODY

Adam Zagajewski, translated by Clare Cavanagh, **Mysticism for Beginners** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

Adam Zagajewski's poetry is concerned with surface and depth, with ordinary moments transfigured by a special kind of attention into luminous embodiments of a deeper life. In *Mysticism for Beginners*, his third collection of poems, the Polish expatriate living in Paris moves further from his earlier style of political commentary without abandoning his awareness of the large events of his country and of the world. He handles such material differently here; the difference is indicative of his overall development, which has achieved the kind of unselfconscious wisdom aptly described by the book's title.

Here, for the sake of comparison, is the beginning of "Iron," a poem from Zagajewski's first book in English, *Tremor*, which appeared in 1985, translated by Renata Gorczynski:

> Why it has to be December.
> The dark doves of snow fly,
> falling on the slabs of the sidewalk. What is
> talent against iron, what is
> thought against a uniform, what is music
> against a truncheon, what is joy against
> fear, the dark heavy snow encloses
> the sprouts of the dream, from a balcony you notice
> as young Norwid shows his I.D.
> to the police and he pleads
> he cannot sign the volklist, the patrolmen
> laugh with contempt, they have snorting
> nostrils and red-hot cheeks,
> tormentors hired from the scenes
> of the Passion, what's that silent crowd
> in a blue streetcar against them,
> who's that sad girl, is that the way
> the new epoch begins, is this tank

with a long Gogolian nose its godfather,
and that gritting iron weighing down
the delicate dove of snow . . .

Not all the poems of *Tremor* deal so pointedly with political subject matter, but neither is this passage atypical. The anger and fear that inform the description of the police are not absent from *Mysticism for Beginners,* but they have been tempered and now take their place among the complex emotional responses of a human being who looks at the world about him keenly and with a kind of postexile, recovered hope. While *Tremor* often uses narrative scenes such as the one with Norwid, in the later book Zagajewski's tone relaxes so that scenes invite metaphor rather than being occasions for explicit prompting (such as "what is music against a truncheon").

Here, for example, is "Search," a short poem from *Mysticism,* in its entirety:

I returned to the town
where I was a child
and a teenager and an old man of thirty.
The town greeted me indifferently
but the streets' loudspeakers whispered:
don't you see the fire is still burning,
don't you hear the flame's roar?
Get out.
Find another place.
Search for it.
Search for your true homeland.

The "true homeland" is no longer literal but of the mind, a reading that is even more clear in the context of the book than in the poem quoted by itself. Such a homeland is perhaps unattainable, like the equally nonliteral planet yearned for in "Refugees":

. . . always that special slouch
as if leaning toward another, better planet,
with less ambitious generals,

less snow, less wind, fewer cannons,
less History (alas, there's no
such planet, just that slouch).

And while the poem tells us the refugees could be our contemporaries from Bosnia or Somalia or Afghanistan or their historical equivalents from Poland or France in the 1940s, the place names cited paradoxically create the sense that the people are from none of these places and at the same time from all of them. Many specific angers have been incorporated into a general compassion for our human predicament (though Zagajewski almost always avoids the weaknesses of generalization). The last stanza of the poem shows the refugees shuffling toward "the country of nowhere."

The ideal is glimpsed often in this book; the fact that it is impossible to achieve, the poems imply, is no reason not to imagine it. Or perhaps the imagining is inescapable, a necessary act of the human mind. In either case, the poet constructs many invisible landscapes. In "The Room I Work In," he says, "I seek images that don't exist. . . ./ I dream of perfect concentration; if I found it/ I'd surely stop breathing./ Maybe it's good I get so little done." The city where he wants to live, he tells us, is one that has (among geophysical characteristics like a river, small hills and ash trees) the qualities of not punishing foreigners and of tolerating poets. It also forgives prophets "for their hopeless lack of humor," a line which in itself is gently humorous (as is "Maybe it's good I get so little done"). Zagajewski's is the kind of humor which implies acceptance of self and other (as opposed to wit, which is often more aggressive, its sword drawn at someone's expense).

In fact the title of this book, striking and attractive as it is, might have sounded slightly condescending — what reader wants to be deemed a beginner? — but is saved from that by just this hope and humor. (Perhaps it is meant to be wry, along the lines of "Freud for Beginners" or "Car Repair for Idiots.") Zagajewski includes himself among the mystical beginners, a man studying the signs this world allows us, probing them with varying degrees of success or frustration from poem to poem. This is not an instruction manual; though there are occasional lines in the imperative ("Forget the

sadness of dark stadiums and streets . . . Accept the warm breath wafting from the plants"), most poems are in the first person, and that person is not the lest presumptuous or overbearing. Quite the opposite.

"Self-Portrait," which falls exactly midbook, addresses the political and personal, the great hunger of the poet for things unseen and the preciousness of the visible moment, all with the kind of implicit humility that is a consistent dimension of *Mysticism:*

> Between the computer, a pencil, and a typewriter
> half my day passes. One day it will be half a century.
> . . . I try to understand
> the great philosophers — but usually catch just
> scraps of their precious thoughts. . . .
> I'm no longer young, but someone else is always older.
> I like deep sleep, when I cease to exist,
> and fast bike rides on country roads. . . .
> Sometimes in museums the paintings speak to me
> and irony suddenly vanishes.
> I love gazing at my wife's face.
> Every Sunday I call my father. . . .
> My country freed itself from one evil. I wish
> another liberation would follow.
> Could I help in this? I don't know.
> I'm truly not a child of the ocean,
> as Antonio Machado wrote about himself,
> but a child of air, mint and cello
> and not all the ways of the high world
> cross paths with the life that — so far —
> belongs to me.

The high world? One could take it to be the world of power and protest, mostly of power and the things the few do to the many, the world of the "big players" of corporations and governments, money and guns, which holds this poet's attention less than it has in the past. There are other depths and dangers in our lives that he

contemplates for the moment — although he's not taking any bets on the future, as the telling phrase "so far" suggests.

Only a poet with some sense of humor about himself could include, in addition to a poem that is self-portrait, a poem that is self-critique. "Letter from a Reader" complains to the poet that he writes too much about death; it asks for more about love and friendship. "Write about life,/ an average day,/ the yearning for order." The poem ends with understated poignancy:

> Write about love,
> long evenings,
> the dawn,
> the trees,
> about the endless patience
> of the light.

But it is unlikely Zagajewski will follow this advice (ironically his own) wholesale. In fact he complains, in turn, about the Dutch painters in a poem by that name — that the things of this world, the pewter bowls and "plump windows bulging from the light," the letters and clouds and gowns, "are immortal, but don't serve us." Despite the painters' reputation for illuminating the ordinary, the poet finds the illuminations themselves ordinary, the loveliness of it all superficial. "Surface and depths don't connect." We are mortal, and mortal things will serve us. What's missing from the painting is the use of shadow the reader-persona objected to in "Letter." Light makes darkness; the two are inextricable, and the paintings err by choosing. Only one painter's vision coincides with the poet's: "Only on the young Rembrandt's face/ an early shadow fell." The shadows are more than political, though the political has not been forgotten: for the paintings are, among many other things, of "a land without secret police."

There are syntactic markers for the fact that Zagajewski's style has changed. While he's still fond of a catalogue, the poems of the current collection use the device far less often. A surprising number of the poems in *Tremor* begin with a catalogue, and since most of

them are in the first half of the book the device may be overused. "A Polish Dictionary" begins "Lances, banners, sabers, horses./ Horses, razors, alphabet blocks,/ warm green lamps, women, manners, burning/ conversations. . . ," while on the facing page "Fate" begins "Frail poetry, muscular state, pursed lips,/ Dog-eared books./ Sunday like hats rimmed with flowers,/ Bricks like fists, fists like cream cakes." A catalogue may be a running start into the events of a poem, but to some degree it does so outside the ordinary expectations of statement. And speaking of running starts, comma-splicing (in which commas replace periods) is another common technique in *Tremor*. Here's the complete "There Will Be a Future":

> There will be rain, there will be feasts, there
> will be bonfires, chestnut husks will crack,
> there will be shouts, someone will hide in the bushes,
> someone will trip over a cherrystone,
> a smell of gas and lilacs in the air.
> there will be laughter, there will be cries, prayers, demure
> and silent lies, there will be a future,
> only you will stay here, in this second-
> class waiting room at the railroad station, dark with
> cigar smoke, under the portrait of the Austrian Emperor.

The headlong propulsion of *Tremor's* poems moves one step further a few pages later when even the commas disappear and we have, instead of a freight train with comma-coupled cars, a continuous trajectory. This is "In the Encyclopedias, No Room for Osip Mandelstam":

> In the encyclopedias once again no room for
> Osip Mandelstam again he is
> homeless still it's so difficult to find a flat
> How to register in Moscow it's nearly impossible
> The Caucasus still calls him Asia's lowland forest
> roars these days haven't arrive yet
> Someone else picks up pebbles on the Black Sea beaches
> This shifting investigation goes on though the uniform

is of a new cut and its wooden-headed tailor
almost fell over bowing
You close a book it sounds like a gunshot
White dust from the paper tickles your nose a Latin
evening is here it snows nobody will come tonight
it's bedtime but if he knocks at your thin door
let him in

I am of course reading both books as collections of poems in English. It is possible that some decisions of technique were made for the English translation and differ from the original, but this is an unknown I have no way of addressing. Another uncertainty, when comparing the two books, is introduced by the fact that they have different translators. I hope it will be considered a compliment to both Gorczynski and Cavanagh that I am setting these factors aside: both books read cleanly and idiomatically, without befuddlements or moments of thinking that perhaps the poet's intent has been clouded. In fact I am basing my perception of Zagajewski's changed style on my confidence in the fidelity of the translations.

But on close inspection the stylistic change is more about content than grammar. This is the same poet, after all, and there are moments of quiet contemplation and gentle humor in *Tremor* — just fewer of them. One measure of the difference in Zagajewski's perspective since *Tremor* is reflected in the occurrences of reading and writing in *Mysticism* and especially in the way these activities affect his perception of time. "I write as slowly as if I'll live two hundred years," he tells us in "The Room I Work In." Toward the end of the book we find him reading a thousand-year-old Chinese poem, discovering in its relative permanence a refuge from short-term measures of success and failure:

Poets attach great importance
to prizes and success
but autumn after autumn
tears leaves from the proud trees
and if anything remains
it's only the soft murmur of the rain
in poems

neither happy nor sad.
Only purity can't be seen,
and evening, when both light and shadow
forget us for a moment,
busily shuffling mysteries.

Here are light and shadow again, the poet's difficult companions, timekeepers of our lives: it is a relief that they can forget us, even if only by the power of projection as we forget *them* under the spell of reading.

More whimsically, in "Moment," time becomes personified and full of "silly joy." And it expands with astonishing elasticity:

The present moment is shameless,
taking its foolish liberties . . .
— what is it — just

a mosquito, a fly, a speck, a scrap of breath,
and yet it's taken over everywhere,
entering the timid grass,
inhabiting stems and genes,
the pupils of our eyes.

This moment, mortal as you or I,
was full of boundless, senseless,
silly joy, as if it knew
something we didn't.

Adam Zagajewski has taken half a step out of his life in the world in order to look at it with a long view, the view of one who can embrace time spans that will not embrace him. This is a paradoxical thing to do, and a brave thing, and Zagajewski does it convincingly. He has acquired a broader range of strategies for poems, and without leaving the younger poet of dissidence behind he has extended his work in the direction of contemplation, quieter but equally intense.

Pamela Alexander

THE WORLD NOTCHED AND MUTABLE

Betsy Sholl, **Don't Explain** (Wisconsin, 1997)

The first poem in Betsy Sholl's new collection takes as its jumping-off point a photograph by Henri Cartier-Bresson which captures a series of fortuitous reflections by stopping them in time. The photographer, she suggests, has served as a sort of medium, exercising what Keats called negative capability, opening himself up to the energies of the moment in order to reveal their latent meanings:

> . . . the photographer must have
> forgotten himself behind that station
> waiting for a perfect moment — caught,
> as a man leaped off a prone ladder
> into a rain-flooded lot, the water
> doubling him in a sort of pas de deux.
> . . . That's how
> the photo was snapped, as if from inside,
> photographer swept up in the man's run
> across the ladder, the water repeating
> his leap, dancers in the poster taking off
> with it across the station wall.

The man leaps unknowingly over his own reflection, which is in turn mirrored by the leaping dancers in the poster behind him, and the whole scene is captured in yet a further reflection, the image as framed in the lens of Cartier-Bresson, without whose active yet selfless intuition the "perfect moment" would have been lost. It's a nice evocation of the artistic process, and for many poets it would have sufficed as a poem in itself.

For Sholl, though, it's only the beginning. "Behind the Saint-Lazare Station" embeds the meditation on the photograph firmly in a narrative set distinctly in time and place — a schoolroom in the '50s — and in the process sets up its own further series of echoes and reflections. The way in which the passages I've just quoted are framed is a good example of the deft subtleties of which this poet is capable. Notice how differently they read in this context:

Every day, seventh period, we'd look
at the photo over the teacher's desk,
till the word RAILOWSKY on the station wall
started a whole year of fake Polish,
perfected by a boy we called Joe
Needs-A-Whiskey. I can still see him posed
under the principal's glare: open shirt,
greased hair, a sullen Elvis. But in art class,
bent over his sketch pad, a softer Joe:
face slack, lost in concentration,

the way the photographer must have
forgotten himself behind that station
waiting for a perfect moment — caught,
as a man leaped off a prone ladder
into a rain-flooded lot, the water
doubling him in a sort of pas de deux.
And if the runner himself merely passed
through, his best moment occurring almost
without him? Well, it's an argument
I first heard from Joe, whistling Doo Wop

through his teeth, as he quick-sketched the page,
hardly looking at his hands. That's how
the photo was snapped, as if from inside,
photographer swept up in the man's run
across the ladder, the water repeating
his leap, dancers in the poster taking off
with it across the station wall. How'd you
do that? I'd sigh, after a swirling hand
and some off-key "Earth Angel" became
a wine bottle and pears on folds of cloth,

while my measured lines kept ending up
erasure smears tossed in the basket,
cartoon bottles I couldn't sweat into roundness. . . .

The poem unfolds so naturally and anecdotally that its complex ar-

chitecture seems completely artless, as we shift back and forth between the photograph and the art class in the easy drift of the speaker's associations. The photo is introduced not as a cultural icon but as the source of high-school humor, while the icon in fact is Joe himself, "posed," "a sullen Elvis," playing his culturally-defined role. At first we see Joe entirely from the outside, but gradually the speaker's gaze opens him up, allows us to glimpse his inner life through watching him draw. The link between him and the great photographer emerges not through grandiose claims about Joe's talent but through observing *his* artlessness, his ability to forget himself ("hardly looking at his hands") by giving himself over to his subject. The speaker, meanwhile, works too hard, struggles self-consciously with her "measured lines." Given its placement in the stanza, her envious "How'd you do that?" seems addressed simultaneously to the photographer and to her classmate, their shared ability to lose themselves in the freedom and exhilaration of art.

There are multiple ironies here, of course: if she failed as a teenaged artist, she emphatically succeeds in capturing the moment now — at least in part, the poem suggests, as a result of what she learned from Joe. The end of the poem pulls the camera back a bit, working through the implications of what she remembers:

> That whole year I lingered in art class
> long after the bell, not knowing why,
> never expecting those moments to last —
> Joe squinting over my crumpled sketches
> for a shadow or line to like, taking
> my stiff hand in his, scent of nicotine
> and graphite, as we moved Ouija-like
>
> across the page. English, math — anywhere
> outside that room, you could follow the rules,
> get somewhere. But there was Joe. There was this
> photo saying, what's a straight line? What's time?
> At the top of the ladder, we just kept
> climbing, Joe riding my hand all over

the paper, across state lines. *Girlchik,*
he'd say, *we need a whiskey,* and he'd draw
till we were loose and giddy, as if we
had drunk whatever he put in my hand.

Part of the poem's charm, of course, lies in its gently erotic fascination, the good girl's attraction to the wrong side of the tracks, and there's a considerable charge in the moment when Joe takes her hand (we didn't know he'd paid her any particular attention until then). The reckless impulse not to "follow the rules" is clearly felt as a dangerous temptation, and the mood of '50s innocence reaches a point of high comedy in the Mann Act image of "Joe riding my hand all over / the paper, across state lines." (It's characteristic of Sholl's formal mastery that she can reintroduce the ladder from the photo and circle back to the fake Polish and the Needs-A-Whiskey joke here.) Yet the flirtation here is not simply, or banally, a romantic one. Crucially, the powerful connection that develops manifests itself in the moment when they are *drawing* together: the looseness and giddiness emerge as she experiences the artistic process from Joe's perspective, allowing her to share, "as if from inside," the sort of vitality the photograph has showed her is possible.

I've explored this poem at length because it's such a good indication of Betsy Sholl's particular strengths. Its economy and precision are expert: note for instance the way in which the adjective "Ouija-like" neatly figures the entranced movement of her sketching hand across the page, as well as slyly delineating the period. But it has a further resonance, suggesting also that in the mechanical process of allowing her hand to be guided she gains some prophetic knowledge, some intuition of the future. Over and over this happens in Sholl's poems: even the most ordinary images turn out to be layered with significance as their place in the design of the poem is discovered and explored.

It's this multiplicity that I particularly want to call attention to. Characteristically, as in the first poem, a number of disparate elements—an image, a narrative, a thematic concern — will be conjoined in a way that at first seems a bit mysterious, then nudged and probed and recycled until their relation shifts into focus and

the whole becomes much greater than the sum of the parts. Often the details or their significance must be reconstructed by the reader — and frequently by the speaker — from fragmentary evidence: a snapshot, a flash of memory. History loops back on itself, as memory is filtered and refracted through present experience. The campus radicals' peace march is blurred against the television image of civil rights marchers in Birmingham; the image of butterflies feasting on a rabbit carcass morphs into the death of the speaker's grandmother and her daughter's feelings of displacement after a move, culminating in the vision of a mythical "bright world always hovering at the edge / of sight." Sometimes, as in the breathless progress of "Valentines," the sheer exuberance of watching Sholl keep all the balls in the air — a trip to SpeeDee Lube, an article on spirituality in *Newsweek*, her daughter's fledgling courtship by her boyfriend, the story of St. Valentine, folklore about birds — approaches the miraculous. But virtuosity is never the point in itself: rather, the technique is utterly persuasive as a representation of the way the mind stitches and weaves in order to come to terms with experience.

What's crucial here is the sense of the speaker's fierce associative process, one image leading inexorably, Ouija-like, to the next. *Don't Explain* is full of references to jazz, and its methods are clearly influenced by notions of improvisation and interplay, as this description of Thelonious Monk might suggest:

> . . . his fine-tuned ears scanning for
> a new sense in dissonance, the way a beat teases
> itself, melody flits like a butterfly, settles,
> takes off, no need to pin down.
>
> . . . spilling, Child, is what it's about.

And in a poem about the blues, she describes the unbidden power of a B. B. King song to clarify and focus experience: "Every time it comes round on the tape, / say I'm jogging, something hushes inside, / gets clarified — something I hadn't known / was jumbled." The music of Sholl's poems has a similar power. Her connections

and associations are so persuasive, ultimately, because they're so entrenched in her view of the world. For her the world *is* metaphor; the instinct to see everything in relation to something else, seems as natural as breathing. Here's how it happens at the beginning of "Mysterioso" (keep your eyes on the similes):

> If you juggle the book of Russian icons
> the cloth on God's knees shimmers like the suit
> Thelonious Monk wears in *Straight No Chaser* —
> sharkskin shifting as he leans into the keys
> picking up shadow and light — almost grooved
>
> like those old Cracker Jacks cards giving us
> two scenes we could jiggle back and forth:
> a boy's smile flipping into a scowl, the world
> notched and mutable — or in another light
> a child might assume whatever was playing
>
> on a person's face, there was an opposite
> lurking behind. And that's just how it is,
> my friend would say, we're both sides of the coin. . . .

I think it's safe to say no one could predict where the poem goes from there, but as a reader I utterly trust the passage it's taking.

The claim that the world is "notched and mutable," that identity is not fixed and stable but fluid and relational, has social and even moral consequences. Sholl's work is ultimately deeply affirmative of the human ability to unite the shards of experience into something at least momentarily coherent; this can happen both in the individual consciousness and, at least occasionally, on a collective level:

> . . . On triple-decker porches
>
> up and down the block, work clothes freeze-dry
> in triplicate, names scrolled in oval patches —

Sonny, Lenny, Bill. They can't sleep either.
That's why our windows all flash the same score,

why we step out between stiffening pants legs
to gaze at the night's neon cardiogram,
and find this moon sailing through clouds,
like an old woman unhinged, cut loose

from her three-piece son. Different porches,
but it's the same long sigh.

("Different Porches")

Suddenly, in an edgy world, there's a sense of neighborhood. "Just being alive breaks a rule — / you talk, you feel, you trust something."

This is not to suggest that Sholl is ever naively optimistic. The subjects of these poems are often painful: suicides attempted and achieved, various manifestations of grief, children in "the demon years," physical and emotional violence. But they are suffused with tenderness, a capacity for understanding, that transcends the raw edges and wards off bitterness and rage. The extraordinary poem "The Rim" — too long to quote here, and it really needs to be read entire — weaves together the narrative of a nephew's madness and eventual suicide with Anna Akhmatova's struggle for speech in a tragic time, before arriving at a precarious but quite persuasive resolution. The most remarkable thing is how successfully Sholl evades sentimentality, given the charged emotional material; her language is so *grounded*, so fundamentally based in the ordinary, that she never seems to stoke the boiler. There's the same sort of capaciousness, the sense of life richly lived and wisdom hard-won, that we find in Gerald Stern (very high praise from me indeed).

I'll allow the last poem in the book to speak for itself. Its design is more straightforward than that of some of the others I've discussed, but its tonal range and its portrait of a mind working on several different layers at once — the letters of Keats, a spring landscape, a recent near-fatal accident, the story the other driver told her afterwards — build to a conclusion of considerable power:

REDBUD

I had to step outside, having just finished
the letters of Keats, who for all his talk of easeful death,
told his friend Brown he wanted to live, wanted his *feeling*
for light and shade, his memories of walking with her —
everything reminds him. *Oh God! God! God!* —
he was barely able to write it, *I should have had her*
when I was in health. Does that mean what it sounds like to us?
Window light and leaf shade on the porch. Next door,
people slipping into their coats, leaving a party. *See ya, Take it easy.*
Hard to believe just last week, I looked up to see a blue truck
crest the hill, flying it seemed, and the driver's surprised eyes
as he fishtailed into me. Barely time to ask, *Am I going to die?*
But nobody did, so can I say it was worth it? say that *beauty*
totalled my car — the stand of redbuds I'd gone to see, purple
blossoms
on rain-slick limbs, stark as petals on a painted scroll blooming
above waterfalls, above tiny figures on a foot bridge crossing
a steep gorge. There we were, waiting for a trooper in that fellow's
cab,
and it seemed he had to tell how he got caught cheating his boss
at the stables, how he was planning to leave a whole mess
of bad credit, racing stubs, a woman who finally said, *Get out.*
Beauty must have been a kind of charm he knew how to use,
aqua eyes, easy smile, the way he could tell his scam and still run it,
share a thermos, ask ideas for his new name. All around us, those
redbuds
so stunning I can't remember now if he drugged a horse,
or fixed a race, dealt off the bottom with his fine jittery hands.
I had Keats in my pocket, himself worried about money,
walking through Scotland to see its waterfalls, astonished
by what he hadn't imagined, the subtleties of tone — moss,
rockweed —
I live in the eye he says to his brother. But they're gone —
Keats, Fanny, Tom, everyone he wrote those exuberant letters to.
What good is *beauty?* Still I saw it, those redbuds, like the moment

making love, into the rush of it, when you think, *I could die now.*
After which — the truck, that fellow telling the trooper flat out
he was doing 50 in a 25, as if beauty has to press its luck,
which the insurance company said had run out:
we'll get him, don't you worry. I don't.
Because he's gone, among the tossing heads of horses,
their nervous sidesteps — gone, without a name,
like those tiny figures dissolving in paint. Imagine,
standing over a gorge where a waterfall plummets — lost,
not so much in thought as its graceful absence, so lost
there is nothing else to want from the world. The *world.*
How beautiful the word sounds. *Whorled.* Purple blossoms
on rain-black trees. The enormous eyes of horses. Rock-weed, slate.
The world loving us, who probably have never loved enough,
never dared let ourselves go that far into its beauty.

Truth and Beauty are up to their old tricks here, combining and recombining in fertile and mysterious ways. I suspect that different readers would identify different places in the poem as the emotional center, the place where it takes off from the ground and achieves full flight. For me it begins where Keats and the truck driver start to echo each other, the driver using the charm of beauty while Keats worries about his debts. And then, in the last ten lines, all the earlier distinctions dissolve: the disappearing driver in turn becoming the "gone" Keats, the "dissolving" figures on the Chinese scroll, and finally the speaker herself, who imagines herself at the edge of the gorge, gazing into the immensity that is nature, giving herself up to the world notched and mutable, learning to let go. Joe Needs-A-Whiskey would be pleased.

David Walker

LOOKING FOR LANDSCAPES

James Galvin, **Resurrection Update** (Copper Canyon, 1997)
Brenda Hillman, **Loose Sugar** (Wesleyan, 1997)
Charles Wright, **Black Zodiac** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997)

Why do I like landscape poems? What makes me hunt for them in new books, among poets familiar and unfamiliar? My reasons are manifold, not easily separated, but I'll attempt a sketchy list.

- Consider the painting analogy for a moment. A painter can't undertake a landscape without diminishing the scale of, and attention to, the human. If human figures are included — by no means a requirement — their relative importance will have to be different than it would be in a portrait or a historical picture or a genre scene. They will be placed within a context that makes them less significant. If you compare the two accounts of Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus'* by W. H. Auden and by William Carlos Williams, you will see that Williams understood this particular meaning and feature of landscape painting even more acutely than Auden did.

- Similarly, a poem that is set in a landscape tells me that the poet is trying in some way to look beyond the ego, beyond the communal and, indeed, beyond the human. Not to exclude these things, in most cases, but to place them in some sort of perspective, next to the larger creation they inhabit and interact with. This means the poem is less likely to be excessively personal, discursive, ideological, and anthropocentric. Since I think too much contemporary poetry suffers from these excesses, I can look to landscape poems for some relief.

- Interior and exterior are likely to cohabit in exciting ways in landscape poems. If such poems are good, they won't — can't — completely be one or the other. The exterior landscape will invoke memory, feeling, rumination, history, and large issues of consciousness, perception, even metaphysics. The interior one will at least be occupied with reifying and objectifying the per-

ceiver's inner world in terms of the outer, mediating and qualifying self-absorption. The mix is surely healthy.

- I actually believe, perhaps quaintly, that poets can and should hope to function, still, in their most ancient role, that of the shaman, living out on the margin of the village, between the community and the larger creation, with all its mysteries, wonders and terrors. David Abram's book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, has some useful things to say about this topic. As he points out, shamans, dwelling between nature and community, so to speak, can mediate between the needs and interests of the community and the world that lies beyond, the plants, the animals, the ecosystem — indeed, the cosmos. We poets no longer get to practice magic, healing, spells and rituals, but we can and do still practice those old forms of mediation, in many, many ways.
- It is mediation between language and what lies beyond language too. When a poet writes a landscape poem, I know that he or she is apt to be working on that interface between the natural and human where so many important issues are confronted. Art and nature argue, dance, and turn into each other. "This is an art that nature makes" (Shakespeare). An old practice, but still a good one.

So I have been looking, among new collections of poetry on our review shelf, for good landscape poems. Not all the books that were published this year got sent to us, so my research is by no means comprehensive.

I begin with James Galvin. This is a poet whose work I have seen on and off for a number of years, always liking what I saw, so that his new large collection, *Resurrection Update*, covering four previous books and some new poems, dated 1975–1997, was a welcome arrival. Galvin grew up in the American West, and his sensibility is at home in the large spaces of the Rockies and the Great Plains, particularly Wyoming and Montana. This huge territory, still largely unwritten about, inhabits his first collection, *Imaginary Timber,* in vivid, memorable ways, as in the following:

WHAT I'VE BELIEVED IN

> Propped on blocks, the front half of a Packard car rides the hillside like a chip of wood on the crest of a wave. It's part of the sawmill. That Packard engine runs it, or did. The rest, the belt, the Belsaw carriage and blade, stands aside in disrepair. Except for the pine seeds gophers have stashed in the tailpipe, there's no sign of anything living. The gull-wing hood is rusted cinnamon, latched over chrome priming cocks, one for each cylinder. Every board in every building here was milled on power from that old car, out of timber cut here too. Even shingles. It's been here since 1925, winters piling onto its forehead like a mother's hands. It's weathered them like a son. Just because it hasn't been run since 1956 is no reason to think it won't run now: waves have traveled thousands of miles to give us small gifts; pine seeds have waited years to be asked.

One could say that Galvin is working here out of a tradition begun by James Wright and Robert Bly, with a prose poem that feels just a smidge belligerent, rural and laconic, fighting off sentiment. One simile, the mother's hands, doesn't seem to me to escape sentimentality of a certain kind, which is often the case (for me, at least) in James Wright as well. The scenery here, however, is Galvin's own, a territory he appears to know like a language picked up in infancy and childhood. He doesn't insist on the vast size of the landscape, but relies on the reader to imagine the huge hillside on which that car can be seen as a chip on the crest of a wave. When he brings the wave back toward the end, and lets it have a timescape and seascape of thousands of miles, he reminds us, once more, subtly, of the scale he is working with.

To make that kind of scale effective, it's equally important to be able to pick up on small details, like the gophers storing their pine seeds in the tailpipe. The seeds too are brought back at the close, to underline a connection between large tracts of space and long stretches of time. That kind of move makes me think of William Stafford's spacious perspectives too. But Bly and Wright and Stafford keep their distance here. This modest, craftsmanlike piece

of writing is Galvin's own, shaped by experience and by his knowledgeable eye.

Imaginary Timber appeared in 1980. Galvin's second collection, *God's Mistress,* came four years later. Here's a landscape poem from late in that collection:

SHADOW-CASTING

This boy's father dies.
Fine.
It always happens.
The boy knows
what to do.
He goes fishing the same stretch of water he angled
with his father all his life till now.
The beaver ponds shine
like a string of pearls.
It isn't easy to fly-cast a mirror-
finish.
The ponds are silting in.
It always happens.
They turn
into meadows.
The stream is choked with sweet-smelling grasses,
cottonwoods, and willows.
He knows what to do with fifty feet
of line out, shadow-casting.
The loops flash over his head, electric
in the sunlight, as if to illustrate grief, or the hem of a luminous
dress in motion.
Then the tapered line rifles out and the lead-
wing touches water with no more force than its own tiny weight.

The surface breaks.
They call them rainbows for a reason.
The boy
opens his father's clasp-knife to open the fish.
As he does this

some lint trapped under the blade, like a cottonwood seed from his father's pocket, falls out and parachutes down to the grass, and suddenly this boy, it always happens, doesn't know what to do anymore.

This expertly distilled narrative knows how to use large panorama — you couldn't see the beaver ponds as a string of pearls except from a height and a distance — and, again, how to counter it by means of the small-scale detail, in this case the piece of lint from the knife. I've never had the pleasure of fly-casting, but the poem makes me experience it. When Galvin returns to the boy's grief, he shows that he has improved on the slightly problematic use of simile in the sawmill poem: he matches the one simile ("as if to illustrate grief") with another, more vivid and distracting ("or the hem of a luminous dress in motion"), acting out the counterweights of grief and pleasure that the poem explores. The lint/seed simile works too, I think, along with "parachutes."

The music of phrases like "the hem of a luminous dress in motion" shows his great care, as does the double use of "open" to remind us how the knife's action replicates the cleaning of the fish, and both point back to the reawakening of the loss. The skill of this piece is an echo of the flycaster's skill, and again the fact that the poet feels so much at home with his landscape — he knows, for instance, the life-history of beaver ponds — gives him a ground on which to rear this delicate, powerful account of something that is familiar — "it always happens" — and is here made new.

Because of the size of this volume, I'm going to allow myself to quote a third example, from Galvin's 1995 collection, *Lethal Frequencies*, This is another of his prose poems:

SMALL COUNTRIES

In defense of whatever happens next, the navy of flat-bottomed popcorn clouds steams over like they are floating down a river we're: under. To the west, red cliffs, more pasture, the blue Medicine Bow with stretchmarked snowfields, quartzite faces like sunny bone. I'm worried about Lyle getting back from

town with his oxygen, but then I see him through binoculars turn the Studebaker, antlike, off the county road and up the four-mile grade, so small down there I want to imagine his hands on the wheel, still strong, his creased blue jeans and high-top shoes I know he wears to town. He turns off the road on a small knoll about halfway up and stops he truck, facing the mountains. He still looks small against so much space, but I can see his left arm and shoulder and the brim of his hat lowered as he lights a smoke and looks off toward the mountains, and small countries of light and dark rush across the prairie towards him and over him.

Readers will have noticed that this piece depends completely on the design afforded by its use of space: the large panorama that is sketched in so expertly in the first two sentences, then the speaker's observation through binoculars of his friend's progress back from town. Studebakers haven't been produced since the early Sixties, so the aging pickup truck becomes a kind of correlative of the dignified, ailing friend of the speaker, probably an old cowboy or ranch hand.

Then come the cloud shadows. The clouds were like the boat-bottoms of a militant navy at the opening, echoing the speaker's anxiety about "what happens next." We can infer that if Lyle needs oxygen and is still smoking, what's coming will not be good; it will be like a slow drowning, prefigured by the underwater imagery at the beginning. But at the end, as he has his little moment of peace and quiet, smoking and watching the mountains, it is not the clouds but their shadows that we fix our attention on. They have enlarged to small countries, and their progress alternates light and dark, pleasure and pain, out on the prairie and under the big sky of the West.

I think some of my pleasure in this piece comes from the subtle way Galvin can associate sounds — *oxygen, binoculars, Studebaker, antlike* — to strengthen the fabric of the poem. He has an ear that lots of his contemporaries seem to lack.

Not every poem in *Resurrection Update* is a landscape piece, of course, so that my survey has not done justice to Galvin's range of subjects, forms and tones. What it has done, I hope, is highlight a

genuine strength that may make readers want to get their hands on this book: an ability to produce long perspectives and complex responses by means of designs that are centered on panoramic uses of landscape. Congratulations to Copper Canyon for making it so roomy — 280 pages — and at the same time keeping the paperback price to a reasonable $16.95.

Brenda Hillman's *Loose Sugar* is a sizable, ambitious book with a complicated scheme, one I am still in the process of figuring out. Alchemy plays a big part in this collection, and there are lots of experiments with spacing, titling and placement on the page, a sign perhaps of the strong interest out in the Bay Area these days in what some call "the theater of the page." A little of that goes a long way with me, but I know Hillman to be a poet with a good eye and an interesting ear, one who has always produced substantive poems, whatever their look. Without proposing to review the whole collection — I find it uneven but fascinating and brimful of generous energy — I want to take a poem that I think benefits from an unusual handling of what I've been emphasizing here — landscape, especially the use of large-scale space and long perspectives as a fundamental aspect of the poem's design:

ORION'S BELT

Read this by your own light,
little body;
read this with your eyes closed;

under the three stars
you learned the origins of love.

When they took you out,
you would push the buttons of their jeans
with your thumb

and the stars stretched in Orion's belt
like the three mysteries
at the start of time.

Dentyne and dope
on their breaths — mostly Dentyne.
Long warm breath

between watching spaces, between
the light shaft that left Orion
a million years ago, and they

tried to see no body
up there, no guilty party,

but to speak of the forces
that made them: hydrogen, helium,
like legendary women,

and at the edge of the universe,
a little buzzing — like a phone left off the hook . . .

They lay on the hoods of cars
(warm engine, ticking) and you
undid their belts; —

Orion lay on his right side,
then on his left, his belt
undone, the three stars

doomed to circle
like the three mysteries at the start of time:

why it happened,
why we suffer,
and how love bothers at all . . .

When you think of those
you will not touch again
in this lifetime

you own a few points on the one body.
Some made you happy.
Everything else —

the pale sword of the hunter,
the uplifted sandal,

everything else mostly fades
in the folds of heaven —

Is this really a landscape poem? It certainly is in my book. I can't read it without responding to the vast spaces it invokes, and, as is so often the case when large space is present, the long stretches of time, back to its beginnings and initial mysteries. The speaker is remembering youthful experiments with sex, involving parking, necking, and more, with boys who wore jeans and drove cars that sat out under the constellations, especially that dominant fall and winter constellation, great looming Orion, the hunter.

Because the speaker associates the three stars of Orion's belt with the undoing of the jeans, there's a linking up of sexuality and the cosmos here, a stretch from ephemeral to eternal, near to far, that helps her organize her recollections and emotions. To me, the poem's successful design depends on the kind of capaciousness that can include the ticking car hoods and the giant, distant constellation, and my charmed response to that use of space is a large part of my delight in the poem. It reminds me that Adrienne Rich opened her 1969 collection, *Leaflets*, with a poem about Orion, one I've always liked, wherein the speaker is trying to take strength from her dialogue with, or monologue toward, the giant indifferent hunter in the sky. In some ways, though, I think Hillman goes Rich one better here, exercising less control, perhaps — her handling of "they" in the middle of the poem, for instance, is very hard to pin down —, and getting, from her looser hold on the material, a more thrilling result.

Again, I would say that the emotional range the poem demonstrates — desire, retrospection, wonder, regret, celebration, wry resignation to the imperatives of time and space — is made possible by the range of scale on which it is conceived, all the way from those

copper rivet-like buttons that are still used on jeans and (sometimes) their flies, up to stars that released the light we are seeing millions of years ago. The mystery that those vast spaces, noble gases, and unimaginable time frames can coexist with the warm, evanescent moments when we take pleasure in each other's bodies is not resolved here; it is simply held up that we may wonder at it too. The mystery becomes tripartite, and as its components are identified — why it happened, why we suffer, how love bothers — they become a new Trinity, the three aligned stars of that belt. They will remain so for me every time I look up at that constellation, interlocking the poem with my own life.

If I had more space and time of my own here, I would cite in full another poem of Hillman's, as an additional example of how she can handle and organize landscapes. I think I would choose "Proud Energy," a sardonic panorama of four twelve-line stanzas. It takes in a California moment that runs from the wildfires in the hills and the brilliant sunsets they make, "dragon streaks of orange" watched by "Doctors with carphones and the young," to the homeless and the addicts visiting church shelters for their first, and in most cases only, meal of the day. The homeless people become the poem's focus for questions about the future, apocalyptic imaginings in a society where people concentrate on ignoring what they can't handle or understand, and the speaker can only urge us to be a little more observant, noticing details of the homeless and starting thereby to mend what is so broken, our links to each other:

> Look at the corners of the eyes: moisture
> triangles, sleep scum . . . We wanted the perfect
> heart but the energy didn't spin
> one of those. The imperfect heart
> of love is not looking away —

An honest, trenchant poem in which, again, the use of scale — she compares the hardboiled eggs that the homeless slip into their pockets to the way "Saturn's shadow might / swallow its small moons" — allows the poet to range widely and summon emotions that would crowd each other in a more constricted space.

Hillman does a great many things in *Loose Sugar*, and not all of them are comprehensible to me, as yet. But her handling of landscapes — by which I mean her interior/exterior emphasis on large scale and scope, spatial and temporal, her stretching out of subject to make for inclusive panoramas, temporal and spatial — makes me trust her and want to learn more.

Our past and present master of the landscape poem is probably Charles Wright, whose Italy, Tennessee, Laguna Beach and Charlottesville panoramas have come to inhabit our imaginations and shape our poetic sensibilities and vocabularies over nearly the span of a generation. To note that this is the twentieth anniversary of *China Trace* in which this project was already well underway, and in which the landmark poem "Invisible Landscape" appeared, is to realize with a start how long and how consistently Wright has been turning out finely tuned and sharply etched studies of the natural world, charged always with the invisible world as well. The unanswerable question of how to reckon and understand our place within nature unfolds and then unfolds again within this enterprise, haunting the poet and his readers just as it has haunted humanity since we first came to consciousness. The newest collection, *Black Zodiac*, shows Wright still moving forward, building on his own achievement, using his expertise at landscape representation to layer tonalities and possibilities, teasing himself about the whole enterprise as he goes.

I have a friend who protests with dismay about what he calls "the new pretentiousness" in current American poetry (he especially instances Jorie Graham), and I have to admit to him that a lot of what we are seeing these days is pretty Baroque, or even Rococo, a little too pleased with itself to please anyone else for very long. But my friend is wrong to include Charles Wright in his blanket condemnation, because that reaction overlooks the humor and self-deprecation that attend Wright's undertaking at every turn. Knowledge of failure and wry mortification are part and parcel of each poem he produces, so that rather than giving us yet another dose of Southern gothic or Mandarin high talk, he is mocking such things, in himself and others, as he goes. Readers just tuning in may find themselves a little startled; those who have followed the project

from its earlier stages to the present will have a better grasp of why and how these complicated poems came to be the way they are.

Here's an example:

OCTOBER 11

October in mission creep,
autumnal reprise and stand down.
The more reality takes shape, the more it loses intensity —
Synaptic uncertainty,
Electrical surge and quick lick of the minus sign,
Tightening of the force field
Wherein our forms are shaped and shapes formed,
wherein we pare ourselves to our attitudes . . .

Do not despair — one of the thieves was saved; do not presume —
one of the thieves was damned,
Wrote Beckett, quoting St. Augustine.
It was the shape of the sentence he liked, the double iambic
pentameter:
It is the shape that matters, he said.
Indeed, shape precludes shapelessness, as God precludes
Godlessness.
Form is the absence of all things. Like sin. Yes, like sin.

It's the shape beneath the shape that summons us, the juice
That spreads the rose, the multifoliate spark
that drops the leaf
And darkens our entranceways,
The rush that transfigures the maple tree,
the rush that transubstantiates our lives.
October, the season's signature and garnishee,
October, the exponential negative, the plus.

I spoke of Wright's "layering" of effects because that is how I see the assembling of such different attitudes and utterances into a single whole. We must react to the diction and imagery, as well as the movement, in terms that take us outside our expectations for what belongs in one place and in a poem. "Mission creep," for example,

is from military and media parlance, along with "stand down." The "minus sign" and "exponential negative" are math terminology, while "force field" belongs to physics and "synaptic" to neuroscience. "Signature and garnishee" are basically lawyer talk. "Transubstantiates" is theological, and "iambic pentameter," of course, is poetry lingo. All this coexists with Beckett and St. Augustine doing hermeneutical turns with bits of the Bible. And with the speaker's attempt to understand the relations of form and formlessness, shape and shapelessness, both in the ultimate sense and in the specific day and month around him. He senses that our sensing of the world orders it but also distorts and disfigures it, but he doesn't know what to do about that, other than notice it.

The middle stanza may just be too abstruse for most folks, but I like the way it both signals the limits of language, in paradox, and genuinely bumps past them for a moment. It carries the double tone of amusement and ultimate seriousness that I tell my friend should disarm his accusations of pretentiousness.

I think the landscape design helps do that too. The speaker is in a specific place and time. He lets his mind and imagination wander, imperiling both place and time as present realities, but he reassures us by bringing us back, to the maple tree that starts in "mission creep" and ends in a rush of transfiguration, making the world the place where we can hope to learn about the ultimate mysteries. At the end, we find him trying, a little desperately, a little bemusedly, to characterize the month of October, to put an epithet on the month that will do it justice. I think he fails, and knows he fails, and means that we should know that too. The poem's success, in other words, lies in its acknowledged failures, the ways language and perception won't get at what they most want to witness and identify.

See if these ideas about Wright's emphases make sense when applied to the next selection:

CHINA MAIL

It's deep summer east of the Blue Ridge.
Temperatures over 90 for the twenty-fifth day in a row.

The sound of the asphalt trucks down Locust Avenue
Echoes between the limp trees.
Nothing's cool to the touch.

Since you have not come,
The way back will stay unknown to you.
And since you have not come,
I find I've become like you,
A cloud whose rain has all fallen, adrift and floating.

Walks in the great void are damp and sad.
Late middle age. With little or no work,
we return to formlessness,
The beginning of all things.
Study the absolute, your book says. But not too hard,

I add, just under my breath.
Cicadas ratchet their springs up to a full stop
in the green wings of the oaks.
This season is called white hair.
Like murdered moonlight, it keeps coming back from the dead.

Our lives will continue to turn unmet,
like Virgo and Scorpio.
Of immortality, there's nothing but old age and its aftermath.
It's better you never come.
How else would we keep in touch, tracing our words upon the air?

Will I startle readers if I say this is one of the funniest poems in *Black Zodiac?* It comes into focus gradually. When you reach the notes at the back, you find out, if you hadn't picked it up before, that it's a dialogue with Du Fu (Tu Fu), the great Chinese poet. His is the voice mixed in with the poet's, and the poem's weaving together of the two sensibilities teases our tendencies to want to encapsulate wisdom. Here it's not so much that assembling of different jargons and dictions by means of which "October 11" unsettled its own solemn tone: it's more like outright self-parody, both by Du Fu and the poet.

Look at the opening of the second stanza. On one level, it's profound, or pseudo-profound, like a great deal of, say, *The Four Quartets*. On another, it's just plain funny, like Henry Reed's parody of Eliot, "Chard Whitlow." And look at the opening line of the third stanza. Is it possible to take that statement seriously? Ditto the close of that stanza, undercutting itself as Wright and Tu Fu both deprecate their own advice and seriousness.

The levels of tone and the range of reference are the special pleasures afforded by these expert poems. The Du Fu poem is funny but also touching, a tribute that is heartfelt as well as self-deprecating. The landscape effect, meanwhile, serves to emphasize the way that the speaker, stuck in a hot summer in Virginia, can't free himself enough to read his "China mail" without feeling sorry for himself, about the heat, about his current lack of inspiration, about the distance between past and present, mortality and immortality. All those Chinese poems in which one poet invites another to come visit, for the special pleasures of the place and season, lie behind this wicked self-parody, teasing itself about its own dark mood.

Wright understands how useful landscape is, and he also understands its limitations and pitfalls. He's creating a late twentieth century equivalent to that great Chinese tradition, and he's smuggling natural beauty and the value of the nonhuman as a check to our own self-infatuation as a species, back into poems where we thought it could no longer cohabit with our pains, anxieties and over-refined responses. Here's how this wonderful collection ends, the last two sections of a thirteen page poem called "Disjecta Membra":

Is *this* the life we long for,
to be at ease in the natural world,
Blue rise of the Blue Ridge
Indented and absolute through the January oak-limbs,
Turkey buzzard at work on road-kill opossum, up
And flapping each time
A car passes and coming back
huge and unfolded, a black bed sheet,
Crows fierce but out of focus high up in the ash tree.
Afternoon light from stage left

Low and listless, little birds
Darting soundlessly back and forth, hush, hush?
Well, yes, I think so.

Take a loose rein and a deep seat,
John, my father-in-law, would say
To someone starting out on a long journey, meaning, take it easy,
Relax, let what's taking you take you.
I think of landscape incessantly,
mountains and trees, lost lakes
Where sunsets festoon and override,
The scald of summer wheat fields, light-licked and
poppy-smeared.
Sunlight surrounds me, and winter birds
doodle and peck in the dead grass.
I'm emptied, ready to go. Again
I tell myself what I've told myself for almost thirty years —
Listen to John, do what the clouds do.

I come to the end of this exploration of my pleasures with the handling of landscape in three new books of poetry dogged by that uneasy feeling which often shadows an emphatic use of terminology: I haven't really defined the particulars of "a landscape poem" in a way that firmly delineates a category or genre. Poetry is like that, I think. Borders exist so that they may shift, formulas are invented so they can be violated. If it isn't broken, break it.

Still, I think I have marked out some familiar and coherent territory. There's the matter of canny uses of perspectives, sizable and multiple. There's the practice of extending regard beyond the human sphere to permit an interaction with the nonhuman. There is inclusiveness and there is the kind of layering that allows radically different subjects and emotions to coexist harmoniously in a poem. I confess, as a reader, to a sympathetic response to poems that put me in a place where I can see and sense a lot, take in what I have sometimes called a panorama — *vista* is another word I might have used, echoing Whitman, among others.

I have found myself thinking of other poets — Eamon Gren-

nan, Pattiann Rogers — whose use of "landscape" I would like to go back and explore. I've remembered with pleasure a reading from last fall, when Gary Snyder performed "The Mountain Spirit," a late section of *Mountains and Rivers Without End* that transforms and parodies elements of an ancient Japanese Nō play to create an encounter in the Sierras that has much of the same thrilling spirituality and playful humor that I've been admiring in Charles Wright. And I've remembered thereby to go back to an article by Bonnie Costello, in *The Point Where All Things Meet*, that deals with "Three Contemporary Landscape Poets."

Costello posits three kinds of landscape poet: the immanentist, the analogist, and the transcendentalist, with Snyder, Ammons and Wright exemplifying each category. She also summons Stevens (the first half of the article's title is "The Soil and Man's Intelligence") and Whitman as significant predecessors in an American tradition of landscape poems.

Terminology and categories do tend to beget more terminology and categories, and I think the jury is still out on whether those three classifications of hers are really all that helpful. But I certainly like what she says at the close of her discussion:

> One function of the poetry of our time (a function served by a variety of aesthetics) is to find a rhetoric in which description and abstraction are openly reciprocal, in which poetic authority thrives on an attachment to soil, artifice on realism, in which percept is not the master or object of thought but the source of its renewal.

Remembering that "percept" means "the meaningful impression of any object obtained by use of the senses," I can see, as she does, why American poets turn to the landscapes they inhabit and visit to create vistas of comprehension and association that will make poetry begin to do what Stevens says it ought to do: help us to live our lives.

David Young

UNDER THE NEST

Ann Lauterbach, **On a Stair** (Penguin, 1997)

Some years ago, a friend of mine told a newspaper interviewer that if someone read a poem of his ten times and still didn't understand it, that was all right with him. One can imagine the response: obscurity! elitism! poets! What the interviewer didn't hear, of course, were the crucial words *ten times*.

There aren't many poems, this side of Old Favorites, that pass the ten-times test, or even the three- or four-. But those that do are increasingly apt, for me, to lie in a territory that's not easily defined. On the one hand, while I may enjoy poems that claim allegiance to what another friend once called the Clear School of Poetry, I'm rarely drawn back to those poems for more than one or two return visits. On the other hand, while I find some Language poems (or near-Language poems) quite interesting, I'm similarly apt to find sufficient pleasure in a single trip or two through their bumpy terrain.

What increasingly interests me is the poetry that lies somewhere between those extremes, that may indeed mediate between them. This is a fairly large territory: edging toward clarity is, for instance, Charles Wright; edging in the more experimental direction is Ann Lauterbach, the subject of this review. Both have been called obscure, but both perform the kind of mediation that interests me.

Obscurity is not my word of choice, but here is William Carlos Williams (!) on the subject: "Obscurity is a very necessary impact to the listener and reader when anything really new is presented. . . . Once a man has penetrated the obscure jungle he is likely to come out on the plateau where he has a much broader vision than he ever knew in the past." Or a woman. Here's Ann Lauterbach, in a 1992 *APR* interview: "The comfort and joy I get from poetry (mine, others) is the exhilaration of being taken to a further place, somewhere I have never been before."

That is what Lauterbach's poetry has been doing for me for some years. Abstract, people say, pointing workshop fingers. But abstract, I would say, in the manner of abstract painting. I spend

time with these poems as I spend time with the paintings of someone like Helen Frankenthaler, or perhaps *in* is the better preposition. And when I come out, I'm on that new plateau, in that further place.

"I'm between Beckett and Bishop / The one entirely in, the other there / Civilizing Brazil, clarity to clarity," Lauterbach wrote in an earlier poem. If most of the poems in *On a Stair,* Lauterbach's fifth collection, are slightly less committed to clarity than her earliest poems, this is because, I think, she is seeing more deeply here. But she is still seeing.

From the same *APR* interview: "Language is promiscuous, and it belongs to everything; we enter it at a certain point and leave it again at another point; if the image is that of a river (Heraclitus notwithstanding), then we need to follow the river where it takes us, but to remember that it moves through a landscape. Without the landscape, there would be no river."

Quoting from a Lauterbach poem is a bit like reproducing a detail of an abstract painting, and most of her recent poems are too long to quote in full. Even the six short *"ON"* poems that are woven throughout the book are best read in the context of each other, and of the book as a whole. Here, however, is *"ON (Word)"*:

> Oh but the sky! unhinged *junket junket*
> traverse Perpetua the jays, the trucks —
> these are violent times
> and our songs are old.
> Hast seen a ghost? Hast fled a tree
> collapsing on your head? And the snow rushes.
> And the storm passes.
> *Are we mere vocabularies?*
> I do or do not believe in God.
> She does or does not love him.
> He did or did not commit a crime.
> The hairy-armed man is dressed
> in the flowered frock of his second-grade teacher —
> A Mrs. Flood from Columbus. He carries
> a large shiny handbag, a gun, a camera

to record their vacation on the east coast.
He is or is not a woman.
Words turn on the mischief of their telling.

The poem, like many of Lauterbach's, begins in landscape (sky, jays, trucks). But words interrupt, and impose their own slightly crazy logic on the rest of the poem, *junket* moving us to traverse to vacation, the martyred saint to God, if not to Mrs. Flood.

That the "mischief" of language includes reference to "old songs" is not atypical of this book or this poet. The shift from "Hast seen a ghost?" to the prosaic tree "collapsing on your head" is echoed in the shift from Whitmanian echo to lost socks in "Poem of the Landscape," where a child's "function, the purpose of / her journey, is to / ask any question, *What is the grass? Have you seen / my socks?*" And then there's "Blake's Lagoon," where the "eyes of dawn / seek the eyes of dusk // something like that."

That poetry, or language, is the place where these and other contraries meet is of course not a new idea: self and the world, subject and object, imagination and reality. Past and future. Life and death. Inside and out. But the contraries are not only less piously represented here (the hairy-armed man and Mrs. Flood indeed); they're also more slippery, less contrary than in Blakean paradox or even Stevensian harmony. "Dialectic" is Lauterbach's word for her process, and it of course implies a potential third term. And the terms are not always easy to fix or locate, even when named.

Note that "*ON (Word)*" is not as linguistically flamboyant as, for instance, "Poem of the Landscape," a relatively long and central poem that begins fairly straightforwardly — except for the characteristically odd (misplaced? displaced?) second word in its otherwise panoramic first line ("Prevalent spinning. High winds. Foothills. One red light") — but ends up including as much apparent autobiography as any poem in the book except one. Conversely, "Figure without Ground" begins with something rather like — well, ground, with a similarly odd word in the third line:

The bridge spans these puddles.
A red chair faces bricks, white curtains

open onto the trek, steepled shadows drape over the city,
dust cloths billow, bodies in protective garb,
illegible scrawl across yellow trucks.

Many poems begin not only in landscape, but also (to return to those old songs) in recognizable music: the ghost of pentameter haunts Lauterbach's work, as in the following lines from the beginning of "Nocturnal Reel," which can also be realigned into a Dickinsonian quatrain if you cut a few words from the first line:

She saw that setting was everywhere she could know, but that
its cause was stupendous and wretched. Everything
required her gaze, as if that alone could repair it.

The linguistic territory here is familiar, too, and we stay in it for twelve lines. But then the language begins to fragment. I can't go far, because the indentations begin to move the lines beyond the right margin of this magazine's page. But here's the beginning of the process:

And whatever constellations thus begun, freestanding
in occupied territory — *25,000 objects*
made by craftsmen, admission free,
soil peeled away like skin — all this
changed, exchanged into that.
And whatsoever is begun —
on her knees, framed
above and below
contusion in her mouth
flawed into saying
(a still arrow
falls
under the wound
(another
partition . . .

This is the kind of writing that makes these poems seem "difficult,"

and it occurs throughout the book. The first poem, "A Valentine for the Future," begins with a series of fragments, some of which include (like the above passage) only the left-hand parenthesis, others of which ultimately connect, either by sound ("fears" to "flair" to "far"), or by subject ("rhetoric of a bird" to singing), or by the picking up of a dropped line, as when the italicized *"hey we just wanted to change the"* is completed with *"singing"* only after three deeply indented fragments. The suspended line is of course a statement of aesthetics, and it defines as well as illustrates the importance of song in Lauterbach's work.

There is also, of course, landscape (to pick up that thread), which, along with song, clearly distinguishes these poems from most language writing. Here is *"ON (Thing)"*:

> And then having to hide under the thing
> the rubber cone or tent
> at the foot of the virulent tree
> and then she, in Paris, with her hair newly cut
> leaving on a train for some place else
> and I unable to decide
> stranded at the deception
> among strange shoes
> and the dull ornaments of a regime.
> The amber light of the mother is
> thickly spread, and patches of carpet
> shag green
> planted on the sidewalk
> to imitate moss, although moss is never there.
> Pushing this aside to get
> under the floor, below the written, as
> in a black winter pond, a cistern
> or pipe or throat —
> circling purple fish, shadow of an arm, toy boat —
> voice thread thru stone, between the *s* and the *t* and the *one*.

Though we're on a pond here (a recurrent image) rather than the river of language Lauterbach identified in her interview, and

though the boat (another recurrent image) is merely a toy, it's clearly language that's getting us through the landscape of this "thing" poem — which seems to be observing through the eyes of memory as much as the present, and also picking up some Edenic references (frequent in Lauterbach's work) from "Poem of the Landscape" (the "virulent tree," the green carpet). The poem seems from the outset to be fighting its own title by proposing to get "under" the thing it proposes to be about. This suggests that the things of *On a Stair* are themselves not merely the seen, but something deeper, more Rilkean.

And there's deeper yet, as in the next poem in the book, "*ON (Dream)*":

> Had then the dream *cash* (something persistent)
> from bed to bed, unanchored
> as from earth to fire to air
> *crash* or *clash* or
> the memory embodied in its shape
> a man with gold portfolio
> behind a wall, a villa, its shape
> larger than "earth" or "water"
> unattached to the sign at the side of the house
> unattached to the dress
> not the tiny bird on the long dark bough
> calling *me me me*
> not the plastic scissors (a cartoon)
> great drift of ragweed
> melody crouched under noise —
> o thing, you cannot cradle this relic
> as it travels through what is.

Most startling here are the last two lines, where language of new and old ("cradle this relic") comes together, making dream more palpable as it "travels through what is" than the thing that cannot hold it.

The poem of course *can* hold, and as the reach into dream implies, it's not just language and landscape, not just self and world that are brought together here, exchanging terms. Dream *is* relic, of

the deepest and oldest past we're likely to know, as well as the darkest, which takes us back to the question of obscurity. The dichotomies of night and day (particularly dawn) are emblematic throughout this book, but not in quite the expected way: "The friction of the Given accosts our lens; dawn / papers over a skeletal real" ("Poem of the Landscape"), and in "Daylight Savings Time," "The dawn is too dark for words." Night is perhaps less dark: in "Nocturnal Reel," "Silence prowls / so that the mind of the listener begins to wander / under the canopy of what has been said / which is only night consuming itself, / iteration by iteration, into silt."

Whether in dream or memory, the poems in *On a Stair* recognize the presentness of what has been (and been said) in a manner that I think surprisingly few poems do. Since Wordsworth, the recovery of the past has been a relatively smooth act, narrative inserting itself into lyric without disruption. But experience isn't much like that: consciousness mixes fragments of memory with present perception in a way that narrative betrays. These poems don't make that betrayal, and thus seem on the one hand truer to experience than either the descriptive or narrative poems they sometimes reflect, and at the same time newer and odder.

Time has always been a central concern of Lauterbach's, but she hasn't reached quite so far in previous books. The reaching is not only toward the past: the book begins with "A Valentine for the Future." But what the sender of the valentine has to offer the future includes a great deal of memory: "forget reference, it burdens the noise," Lauterbach writes, but then notes and jokes (after some fragments intrude) that "that was a memory of sorts so forget it." The poem ends with "a child with a pail and some sand and some glue."

The child is a central figure in *On a Stair,* and a relatively new one for Lauterbach. *I* hasn't been dominant in her work since her first book, when some of the dialectical interaction was represented by an *I* addressing a *you*. *She* has been the prevailing pronoun, and has for some time seemed a medium for looking back: the dominant figure in *Clamor,* Lauterbach's third book, is a girl, a young woman. That *she* is more prominent than *I* not only acknowledges the

fragility of the self (the "tiny bird . . . calling *me me me*"), but also seems true to experience: as the psychologists remind us, our distant memories are "observer memories," in which we see ourselves along with everything else; it's only recent memories in which we see a "field" that excludes us.

In *On a Stair*, the *she* that is child makes significant appearances in several poems, including "Bramble Portrait" and "Poem of the Landscape"; a mother and a father appear with some frequency too, as do several toys, with a clown and a doll assuming speaking roles in the long sequence that occupies the approximate middle of the book. The dominant influence here is Roethke (whose famous "I'll be an Indian" lines Lauterbach paraphrases in both this book and an earlier one). When Clown speaks, the language is Roethkean: "*Ur* said Clown from a shelf said Harmony Clown / from his seat on the shelf before Is."

As "ur" suggests, the intent here, as in Roethke, is to get back to beginnings, as in dream, as in unconscious, if not something deeper. Roethke's images for this, while inclusive of the mother, are deeply male. Lauterbach's are female: a central image is the nest, which appears at the bottom of the book's first page ("the rhyme is under the nest / and under that is / private") and gives a title to the long poem that almost (it is followed by "Invocation") ends it.

Before we reach that end that returns us to the beginning, the book becomes, in its second half, more elegaic: there is a "Delayed Elegy," and the figure of the child ceases to haunt the landscape. The toys are still there, as in the toy boat of "*ON (Thing)*," but increasingly the pleasure of the book becomes, for the reader, one of making connections as familiar landscapes and emblems are revisited and interchanged.

Emblem is Lauterbach's word, and a key to appreciating her poems: the bird, the stair, the pond, the nest, the canopy and the green carpet recur and interact in increasingly interesting ways as the book moves toward its finish. This makes the experience of this book, more than Lauterbach's earlier ones, similar to that of looking at many paintings by the same artist, as in a gallery. Here is "Staircase," a poem from approximately three-quarters of the way through the book:

Stay. A legible harmonic twins the harbor.
There are choral episodes
among the sails, and the kingfisher's plunge.
Stay. A pretty wind fingers heat
like a girl her curls, gazing out
at the ensuing collision. A woman,
steering into floodwaters, is swept into a canyon
in Tucson, Arizona. Had she read Empedocles?
Had she recently wept? Light
infected leaves, then drab, then
heavily attired
the ephemera of air's
sway, window to window, like a disembodied
wing, its passage wholly unrecovered.
In mournful arousal
a flame cascades, as if to touch the end.
Something waits in the normal blue,
a Saturday, or love, or a city besieged.
The effects were known; they were the lived thing
ardently collapsing into a distant litter:
remote pages to be burned,
the wake of a small green boat
allotted to a scrim, or Paris,
or Celan. How beautiful, how untrue!
is what historians would say
as white stuff swept over the bow
not ever acknowledged —
not yet counted, not yet
found. There is
the ferret, Luna, lost in a woodpile
in the dog days of August.
Someone called Matthew, and someone called Tom,
move across time as across a bright lawn while
a felicity steers into moonlessness, where
one might say *not a matter of seeing,*
a matter of touch. Homer, for example,
finding his way down the staircase.

Again, we begin in landscape; again, as in the first poem of the book, the landscape incorporates music. And then we're off. The poem resonates with earlier references; even the three poems quoted above give some sense of this. Can the girl-become-woman be Mrs. Flood, of *"ON (Word)"*? Is Empedocles consciously taking us back to the fire and air, earth and water of *"ON (Dream)"*? And here is a "small green boat" in the vicinity of Paris, as in *"ON (Thing)."* There are, as always, fragments of memory, Matthew and Tom moving "across time as across a bright lawn," along with "the ferret, Luna, lost in a woodpile," who becomes wonderfully transformed by language into "a felicity" (Perpetua's sister-saint?) that "steers into moonlessness." We're beyond seeing here, as the haunting last lines tell us.

The stair that titles the book as well as this poem and these lines appears to come from a statement by Emerson quoted in "N/est," the aforementioned long poem that nearly closes the book: *"We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight."* This is where we are throughout the book, looking (or feeling, like Homer) below and above at the same time, in time and in consciousness too; and it is emphatically where we are in "N/est."

To call this long poem uncharacteristic is to understate: though it begins with clear but slightly and jokily displaced language ("In that part of the day I was carefully measured for aridity"), it is more autobiographical, even "confessional" than anything Lauterbach has yet published. The narrative is not initially straightforward: beginning with a pond where a wedding has occurred, it moves back to a pond of childhood and the father who appeared in "Poem of the Landscape" — the parent, we learn here, who died when the poet was young. The subject of her father-writer takes the speaker simultaneously to the subject of her childlessness and the subject of her writing: "I have never explicitly affiliated my not having children with / my father's absences / I thought I would find him in the heavy / book of words, dictionary . . . or perhaps / find a way to him on little word boats, paper sails. . . ." Then the poem becomes remarkably linear, describing the circumstances of three

abortions. Children, incidental and otherwise, appear in this narration, and as the poem moves relentlessly forward, the children of the wedding couple and others begin to grow up. Near the end of the poem the ultimate contraries, birth and death, are united in a hospital where a child is born "four flights below" the place where the poet watched a friend die. But something more surprising, more moving, and more important occurs here as well. At the end of the abortion narration, birds enter the poem in great multiplicity, and then, "across the pond," more singly. In the final movement of the poem, the subjects of aborted birth and poetry are wonderfully interwoven in a nest of language. The last image of the poem is that of a "tiny fledgling . . . on a low branch" that then becomes, in the photograph of the final two lines, "a blur on a bough of blue spruce / the nest a palm of dry mud on the ground." The bird takes us back to "the rhetoric of a bird" with which the book opened, but with considerably more resonance: the Whitmanian child has grown into the speaker of something like "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" — the difference being that this is a woman poet approaching poetry with a deeper knowledge of what the cradle/nest is or might involve. Giving birth and making art are both matters of precarious choice: "when poems are made I try to listen to how they want to become / sometimes they perish." Still, there is the bird, its blur in the photograph; there is the sometimes clear, sometimes obscure poem. Under the nest, it is.

Martha Collins

MARY ELIZABETH BAILEY's poems have appeared in *College English, The Boston Phoenix, Southern Poetry Review,* and *Poetry East.* She currently teaches at the University of Southern Maine.

MARY BAINE CAMPBELL is the author of **The World, The Flesh & Angels** (1989) and a new manuscript, **Trouble,** which includes "The Michael Jackson Interview." She teaches medieval and Renaissance literature, and poetry generally, at Brandeis University.

JANE COOPER's most recent collection is **Green Notebook, Winter Road** (Tilbury House). She was the 1995–97 New York State Poet. About the poem "Mourning Picture," she writes: "The italicized phrases come from the artist's catalog copy for this and another, untitled painting. Of "For John Berryman (1914–1972)" Eliason wrote: 'When I read in January of Berryman's suicide leap from a Minneapolis bridge it was as if he would never stop falling and rock and stones (were there any?) changed to molten masses as unwritten poems, not to be lost, spilled everywhere, searing, dissolving the surrounding landscape. There is no color.'"

MICHELE GLAZER's first collection, **It Is Hard to Look at What We Came to Think We'd Come to See** appeared recently from the University of Pittsburgh Press. She lives in Oregon and works for the Nature Conservancy.

MIROSLAV HOLUB is a frequent contributor to these pages. His new book of essays, **Shedding Life: Disease, Politics, and Other Human Conditions,** appeared last fall from Milkweed Press. Faber & Faber, in England, have just published a new collection of poems, **The Rampage.** It is not available in the United States, but the two prose poems in this issue appear in it, as do a number of the newer poems in **Intensive Care: Selected and New Poems** (*FIELD* Translation Series, Oberlin College Press, 1996). His translator, REBEKAH BLOYD, is a former Oberlin student who teaches creative writing in San Francisco.

McKEEL McBRIDE's fourth collection of poems, published by Carnegie Mellon, is **Wind of the White Dresses.** She is professor of English at the University of New Hampshire.

This is THORPE MOECKEL's first publication. He is a Bowdoin graduate ('94) and he and his wife live in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania and work as outdoor educators on the Appalachian trail.

CAROL OLES is Professor of English and Coordinator of Creative Writing at California State University, Chico. Recent work of hers has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly, Kalliope,* and *The Women's Review of Books.*

ALAN MICHAEL PARKER is the author of **Days Like Prose** (Alef Books, 1997), and North American Editor for a forthcoming **Who's Who in 20th Century Poetry** (Routledge, 1999).

CARL PHILLIPS is the author of **Cortege** (1995) and **From the Devotions** (1998), both from Graywolf. He teaches at Washington University in St. Louis, where he directs the writing program. Of the poem "Against His Quitting the Torn Field," he notes: "The first two italicized stanzas are quotes from the prose book **Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses,** a Middle English text. The lineation, of course, is mine."

MARGARET SHIPLEY has published two collections of poems, **Burning the Trees** and **The Light Angels,** as well as a novel, **The Sound of the Sun.** She lives in Webster Groves, Missouri.

MARCIA SOUTHWICK's books include **The Night Won't Save Anyone** (Georgia) and **Why the River Disappears** (Carnegie Mellon). We're delighted to announce here that she has just won the second annual *FIELD* Poetry Series contest. Her manuscript, **A Saturday Night at the Flying Dog & Other Poems,** to which the poems in this issue belong, will be published later this year.

DONNA STONECIPHER lives in Prague.

TERESE SVOBODA's most recent publications are **Cannibal,** a novel (NYU Press, 1995), and **Mere Mortals,** a collection of poems (Georgia, 1995). She teaches at Williams College.

ELIZABETH TROTTER has recently had poems in *The Ohio Review, Ascent,* and *Manou.* She teaches in Tacoma, Washington.

LEE UPTON's third book of poetry, **Approximate Darling,** appeared from the University of Georgia in 1996. Her third book of criticism, **The Muse of Abandonment,** will appear this year from Bucknell University Press.

NANCE VAN WINCKEL's third book of poems, **After A Spell,** will be out next fall from Miami U. Press. She has also published two collections of inter-related stories, **Quake** (1997) and **Limited Lifetime Warranty** (1994), both with U. of Missouri Press. She teaches in the MFA Program at Eastern Washington University.

NANCY WILLARD's most recent publications are **Swim-**

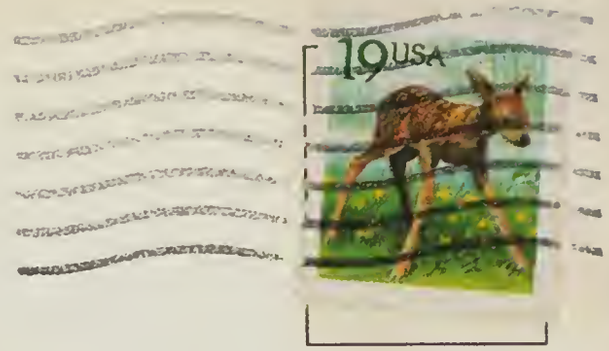
ming Lessons: New and Selected Poems (Knopf), admired in these pages last year, and **Cracked Corn and Snow Ice Cream** (Harcourt Brace).

MARTHA ZWEIG's first full-length collection, **Bright Salt,** will appear in 1999 from Wesleyan. She lives in Hardwick, Vermont.

Ho, hum... another portrait of Satan.
Hey, guess what, I'm a New Yorker!
I love my job - already reading
manuscripts and I get a lot
of free books. Life could be worse!
I have a railroad apartment
right over the best omellet(sp)
joint in the city but alas,
the mailbox is empty. It
really likes Chinese poetry in
translation... any ideas on how
to find/start a reading/writing
group in the East Village?
Ok! My address is: ~~Pierre~~ 113 Avenue A, apt 1A
New York, NY
10009.

I hope you're
well! Hi to
everyone!

Love,
David



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